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1. Introduction

Finland is bound by international instruments such as United Nations' Conventions and European Union Directives and national law to combat trafficking in human beings, including child trafficking, and to protect children's rights and provide special protection measures for them in the criminal justice process. In recent years, the awareness of and research in trafficking in children in Finland have increased. The number of identified child victims of trafficking in human beings remains low.

The desk research phase was conducted in spring 2025 by going through relevant laws, policy documents, action plans and reports concerning trafficking in human beings and/or children's rights.

Through three focus group discussions and 16 expert interviews, information on current trends as well as on good practices and challenges was gathered. The participants were chosen based on existing contacts between HEUNI and professionals routinely working in the field of trafficking in human beings, as well as snowballing method where recommendations were asked from interviewees regarding relevant experts.

Three focus groups were organized in total, the first targeted at NGO experts, the second at governmental and municipal authorities and officials, and the third at law enforcement officers and members of the judiciary. 14 persons in total took part (13 women and one man): four NGO representatives, four professionals working in social and victim services, two law enforcement officers, two members of the judiciary, and two governmental representatives.

Of the 16 one-on-one expert interviewees, 12 were women and four men. They included five law enforcement officers, five members of the judiciary, four professionals working in social and victim services and two NGO representatives.

The gender imbalance among the professionals reflects, in our experience, the situation in Finland, where most experts and professionals working with issues related to trafficking in human beings are women.

2. Legal and policy framework

2.1. Existing legal and policy framework on child trafficking

Trafficking in human beings was criminalized in Finland in 2004. The trafficking legislation follows the UN Trafficking Protocol of 2000. The offence of trafficking in human beings (Criminal Code 39/1899, chapter 25, sections 3 and 3a) contains three separate elements: act, means, and purpose. In trafficking crimes, the offender takes advantage of the dependent status or insecure state of the victim in order to subject them to exploitation. If the victim is a child, the means need not be proved. In other words, proving the act, e.g. recruitment or harboring, and the purpose of exploitation, e.g. sexual exploitation, forced labor, or other circumstances contrary to human dignity, is sufficient in cases involving child victims. Circumstances contrary to human dignity include conditions resembling slavery, including debt bondage.¹

¹ Government Proposal 34/2004, 97.



The Finnish trafficking legislation was amended in 2015 to better correspond to the obligations concerning criminalisation found in the international treaties that bind Finland, and to clarify the difference between the crimes of human trafficking and pandering/pimping. In beginning of 2025, the trafficking legislation was further amended to include forced marriage explicitly as a purpose of exploitation. The law contains a broad definition of forced marriage, which includes situations where after initial consent to marry, a person is prevented from leaving said marriage. It also covers other than legally binding marriages, such as so-called religious unions. The penalty scale for trafficking in human beings is from four months to six years of imprisonment; for aggravated trafficking in human beings, from two to ten years of imprisonment.

Finland is a party to the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, which emphasises the status and identification of the victims. The implementation of the Agreement is supervised by the Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA), which has assessed Finnish actions against human trafficking and issued recommendations to the authorities in three rounds. Child trafficking was one of the focus areas in GRETA's second report on Finland published in 2019. GRETA's recommendations focused on identifying and preventing the risk of trafficking among unaccompanied and separated children seeking asylum.²

Finland has transposed the European Union Directive on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims (2011/36/EU) and is currently in the process of transposing the amended directive of 2024.

Finland is party to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which obliges children to be protected from all forms of sexual exploitation and abuse, such as the exploitative use of children in prostitution or in pornographic performances and materials. Finland is also obliged to take national, bilateral and multilateral measures to prevent the looting, sale and peddling of children for any purpose and in any form. Based on the Convention, a National Child Strategy was prepared in parliamentary cooperation and published in 2021. According to one of the strategic policies, "-- efforts to combat child trafficking and other forms of human trafficking will be stepped up across different administrative branches."³

Finland ratified the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (Lanzarote Convention) in 2011. The Convention aims to prevent and combat sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children, to protect the rights of child victims of said crimes, and to promote national and international co-operation against said crimes. The Lanzarote Committee oversees the implementation of the Convention. A National Action Plan for the Lanzarote Convention for the years 2022–2025. One of the actions in it is to "increase co-operation between low-threshold services and awareness of the link between child sexual abuse and human trafficking"⁴.

The rights and best interests of children are also emphasized in the Victims' Rights Directive (2012/29/EU). The risk of secondary and repeat victimization, intimidation and retaliation is

² GRETA 2019, 46–47.

³ Finnish Government 2021, 34.

⁴ Malja & October 2022, 87.



acknowledged in the Directive to concern victims of human trafficking and child victims of crime.

In October 2023, law amendments entered into force, stipulating that several crimes against children must be processed urgently. This applies to cases where the plaintiff is under 18 years old and the suspected crime is a sexual crime or a crime against the life, health, freedom, privacy, peace or honor of the injured party – i.a. human trafficking. The prosecutor must also make the decision on pressing charges urgently, and the court has to begin the main hearing within 30 days of the initiation of the case.⁵

In accordance with international obligations binding Finland, victims of human trafficking, including children, are entitled to specialized assistance and support. In Finland, measures for assisting victims are provided by the Assistance System for Victims of Human Trafficking (NAS), which operates under the Finnish Immigration Service. Provisions on assistance are laid down in the so-called Reception Act, i.e. the Act on the Reception of Persons Applying for International Protection and on the Identification of and Assistance to Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings (746/2011). The law was last amended in 2022 to weaken the connection between support for victims and the criminal procedure. The changes were approved by the Parliament in the end of 2022 and entered into force on 1 January 2023.⁶

Assistance measures under the Reception Act include advice and guidance, safe accommodation, a reception allowance or income support, social services, health care services, interpretation and translation services, legal aid and legal advice, tracing of the parent or guardian of a child victim without a guardian, and support for a safe return. A representative is appointed for a child without a guardian who is taken into the Assistance System. Undocumented migrants may be given a 1–6-month reflection period by the NAS, if they are identified as potential victims of trafficking.

National Assistance System also provides assistance to children of victims of trafficking who have been accepted into the system. Furthermore, they provide support to victims of trafficking who have been exploited outside of Finland, e.g. during their migratory journey or in their previous country of residence.

In April 2025, an amendment into the Finnish Criminal Code took effect, which added involvement in street gang activity, inciting children under the age of criminal liability (i.e. under 15) into committing an offense and using humiliation as grounds for increasing the severity of the punishment for a crime. By inciting a child to commit a crime on their behalf, a person may seek to avoid criminal liability, and they also may find it easier to incite a child than an adult.⁷ In the Government Proposal of amending the Criminal Code in regard to the incitement of children, the action is described as the exploitation of a child. Moreover, it is stated that if the inciting contains pressure or coercive features, it may also fulfill the elements of coercion (CC 25:8).⁸ However, potential links to the crime of trafficking in human beings are not discussed.

⁵ Oikeusministeriö 2023.

⁶ Government Proposal 220/2022 vp; Report by the Administration Committee HaVM 30/2022 vp; Ministry of the Interior 2022.

⁷ Government Proposal 219/2024.

⁸ Government Proposal 219/2024.



The Marriage Act (234/1929) was amended in 2019 so that persons under the age of 18 could no longer marry in any circumstance. Before, based on an application made by the underage party, the Ministry of Justice was able to grant permission for them to marry. According to the Government Proposal leading to the amendment, the interest of protecting underage persons from potential risks related to marriage (e.g., exploitation) was one of the reasons for no longer granting exceptional permissions for underage persons.⁹

There have been four Anti-Trafficking National Action Plans in Finland. The first national action plan against human trafficking was published in 2005, and a more detailed national action plan was adopted in June 2008.¹⁰ The most recent Action Plan covered 2021–2023 and included several measures to combat human trafficking in Finland.¹¹ A new NAP is under development and will be launched for 2026–2027. Trafficking in children and the particularly vulnerable status of underage victims is highlighted in the NAPs.

The National action plan on Non-Violent Childhoods 2020–2025¹² aims to prevent violence against children, including child trafficking. The action plan covers the rights of the child, inclusion, factors that protect against violence as well as risk factors and their consequences. The aim is to improve the position of the child victim in the current service, care and crime systems with focus on prevention, minimising harmful impact and providing treatment. New action plan is being finalised and covers 2026–2033 with separate chapter on actions against child trafficking.

Pursuant to the Child Welfare Act (417/2007, section 25), a child welfare report is submitted without delay on a child victim or the children of a victim admitted to the Assistance system, if the child's need for care, circumstances endangering the child's development, or the child's behavior make it necessary to investigate the need for child protection. Furthermore, the police must be immediately notified, regardless of the confidentiality provisions if in the course of their duties professionals have reason to suspect that a child has been subjected to: (1) a sexual offence under Chapter 20 of the Criminal Code; or (2) a serious offence against life or health under Chapter 21 of the Criminal Code, punishable by at least two years' imprisonment.

Section 15 of the Child Welfare Act stipulates that the health care unit of the well-being services county must provide expert assistance in case-specific child welfare and, when necessary, arrange examinations as well as treatment and therapy services for the child. Furthermore, it is stated that services needed to investigate suspected sexual exploitation or physical abuse of a child must be provided as a matter of urgency.

2.2. Effectiveness of the framework

The current legal and policy framework in place is comprehensive and child victims of trafficking have access to multiple forms of support and assistance. Interviewed experts however pointed out that lack of resources and lack of specialization may hinder the implementation of policies in practice, for example in terms of identification of potential victims, their referral to services and in organizing practical support to trafficked children as well as in terms of securing convictions under the human trafficking qualification in court.

⁹ Government Proposal 211/2018.

¹⁰ Ministry for Foreign Affairs 2005; Ministry of the Interior 2008.

¹¹ Roth & Luhtasaari 2021.

¹² Korpilahti et. al. 2020.



One of the focus areas of the second report by the Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA) on Finland was the vulnerability of children to trafficking. In the 2019 report, GRETA urged Finland to enhance their efforts in preventing child trafficking, particularly regarding unaccompanied and separated children arriving in Finland. Measures to achieve this included, e.g., providing effective care arrangements for unaccompanied and separated children and systematically conducting police investigations into their disappearances, training child welfare professionals and (other) frontline professionals on trafficking risks and prevention measures, raising public awareness about the risks and manifestations of child trafficking, and including trafficking in human beings as a topic in the national school curricula.¹³ Furthermore, GRETA urged Finland to take into account the special circumstances and needs of child victims in the development of the National Referral Mechanism, to routinely consider the possibility of trafficking when interviewing asylum-seeking children, and to proactively identify unaccompanied children who might be victims of forced marriage.¹⁴

In its third report in 2024, GRETA acknowledged Finnish measures taken to strengthen child-sensitive procedures in getting access to justice and remedies. However, GRETA urged Finnish authorities to take further actions to reduce the risk of children going missing from state care as well as to increase their outreach work to identify child victims of trafficking. GRETA also recommended, for instance, providing further training and tools to frontline professionals on the identification of child victims of trafficking, and raising children's awareness on trafficking risks, particularly regarding recruitment and abuse online.¹⁵

Valovirta and Kainulainen (2024) analysed 35 charges and convictions concerning trafficking in children from 2021–2024.¹⁶ The study examined the forms of exploitation of children, the factors considered in the legal assessment of the cases, and recognition of the children's special need for protection. The dismissal rate of charges was 46 per cent, which is exceptionally high. In a large part of the cases, the courts did not interpret the definitional elements of trafficking in a child-oriented manner, and that there was incoherence in the legal practice, with the definitional elements of trafficking in human beings applied differently in cases with similar characteristics. The study showed that there are clear shortcomings in using the Criminal Code to protect children from exploitation in the context of human trafficking.¹⁷

In 2021, the Deputy Chancellor of Justice performed an independent inquiry of human trafficking investigations, after media articles concerning pre-trial investigations and their shortcomings were published. The Deputy Chancellor reviewed materials of 50 pre-trial investigations and stated that there were delays in processing most of the cases due e.g., low resources, the inexperience of the investigators in investigating trafficking crimes, problems with interpretation and multi-agency co-operation, as well as difficulties in identifying the elements of trafficking in human beings due to which some offenses had first been investigated as other types of crime. According to the Deputy Chancellor the National Police Board and the Police University College should strengthen the training given to the police on trafficking in

¹³ GRETA 2019, 16.

¹⁴ GRETA 2019, 28.

¹⁵ GRETA 2024, 49.

¹⁶ Valovirta & Kainulainen 2024.

¹⁷ Valovirta & Kainulainen 2024, 5.



human beings are similar crimes.¹⁸ Since then, projects such as Modeling of pre-trial investigation of human trafficking offenses (Ihmemalli)¹⁹ have been undertaken to improve the investigation capacity of the police in human trafficking crimes.

According to interviewed law enforcement officials, the police has become more aware of the dynamics of child trafficking in recent years and are now using also human trafficking as an investigation label in certain types of cases of sexual crimes against children. Generally, police officers investigating sexual crimes against children are highly trained in interviewing methods and are well-reversed in encountering children in difficult situations. Criminal exploitation is more difficult to identify as cases involving children as perpetrators of e.g. property crimes are not necessarily dealt with by such specialised officers.

However, both the law enforcement officers as well as NGO representatives noted that while there are now more specialised prosecutors who are well-reversed in trafficking issues there is almost no specialisation among judges which sometimes results in challenges in getting convictions even in cases with comprehensive evidence.

All focus groups, but especially NGO representatives and law enforcement officers brought up challenges in dealing with cyber-facilitated exploitation of children. This is an area where more focus should be placed. Halmeenlaakso (2023; 2025) has argued that human trafficking related to child sexual abuse online should in certain cases be treated as placing the child into circumstances contrary to human dignity.²⁰ Furthermore, the production and distribution of online material featuring the sexual abuse of a child should be looked at as a phenomenon linked to human trafficking criminality and networks, instead of focusing solely on individuals in possession of or sharing such material.

Halmeenlaakso suggests that crimes resembling human trafficking should also include, in addition to pandering/pimping, crimes related to the sexual abuse of children. Currently, the overlap in legislation may potentially lead to situations where the possibility of trafficking in human beings is not investigated when the elements of a clearer and more concise sexual crime are fulfilled.²¹ This was also mentioned by interviewed law enforcement officers and members of the judiciary who outlined that the criminal justice actors may more used to investigating these kind of sexual offences under more traditional crime labels, so they are used and are also more likely to result in a conviction. This is because certain elements of the trafficking definition are considered difficult to prove, even though the legislative framework itself is considered to be sufficient.

3. Institutional landscape

3.1. Public institutions

Non-discrimination Ombudsman was named as the National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings in Finland in 2009. The rapporteur is fully independent and reports to the Finnish Parliament, which means that they can influence anti-trafficking work and how it is

¹⁸ Oikeuskanslerinvirasto 2021.

¹⁹ <https://polamk.fi/en/ihmemalli-en>

²⁰ Halmeenlaakso 2023; 2025.

²¹ Halmeenlaakso 2023, 5–6, 107–108; Halmeenlaakso 2025.



developed based on their recommendations. Several of their reports have considered the issue of child trafficking.

The Police is the main criminal investigation authority in Finland and responsible for the investigation of child trafficking cases. In early 2021, the police set up an investigation team specialised in human trafficking offences at the Helsinki Police Department. They have units specializing in labour exploitation, sexual exploitation and large-scale cases that require special expertise. In addition, three persons are placed in the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) and tasked with forming an overall picture of the trafficking situation, producing various analyses and engaging in international cooperation.

In the guidelines of the National Police Board, it is indicated that all police departments must ensure that they have access to sufficient expertise so that they are able to investigate the special features of human trafficking criminality. The guidelines state that the preconditions for the effectiveness of anti-trafficking measures include the ability to identify potential victims of human trafficking in all police activities and to refer them to the NAS.²² However, the guidelines also note that victims cannot be forced into the assistance system; rather, referral to the assistance system must be based on the individual's consent. In the case of children, protective and restrictive measures defined in the Child Welfare Act may be used when necessary.²³

The Border Guard is a criminal investigation authority referred to in the Criminal Investigation Act (805/2011). A more detailed description of its role in crime prevention is provided in the Act on Crime Prevention by the Border Guard (108/2018). Trafficking in human beings is one of the crimes that falls within the mandate of the Border Guard in cases where it is associated with the facilitation of illegal entry, as referred to in chapter 17, section 8 and section 8a of the Criminal Code of Finland (39/1889). The Border Guard has the right to data monitoring and covert intelligence gathering if there is justified reason to suspect that aggravated facilitation of illegal entry or related trafficking in human beings will be committed (Act 108/2018).

Prosecutors work in close cooperation with criminal investigation authorities. Special prosecutors work in particularly demanding criminal cases that fall within their field of specialization. Some prosecutors are specialized in human trafficking cases and they can provide professional assistance to other prosecutors.²⁴ When suspecting human trafficking or similar offences, a notification referred to in the Criminal Investigation Act, chapter 5, section 1 must always be submitted to the prosecutor.

National Assistance System for Victims of Human Trafficking operates under the Finnish Immigration Service. The Assistance system coordinates victim assistance to trafficked persons and their children in the whole country and is responsible for helping victims who do not have a municipality of residence in Finland (e.g. undocumented migrants, asylum seekers).

The regional well-being counties are responsible for the provision of assistance to victims who have a municipality residence (e.g. citizens of Finland, refugees) The regional well-being counties took over the tasks of organizing the social and health care services from municipalities in 2023. The counties provide various social and health services to victims who

²² Poliisihallitus 2020, 2.

²³ Poliisihallitus 2020, 11.

²⁴ The Finnish Prosecution Service 2021.

reside in their region, including child welfare services. Different counties have organised assistance to victims of trafficking in different ways: some have specialized units/designated persons responsible for victims of trafficking, while others do not. The regional well-being counties can receive reimbursement for costs incurred from assisting victims of human trafficking from Centers for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment (ELY Centers).

Finnish Immigration Service is responsible for issuing residence permits and reception of asylum seekers, including unaccompanied minors. The migration service runs reception centers as well detention centers, and their staff can identify victims of trafficking in their various processes, e.g., during asylum hearings, at the reception and detention centers, and when issuing permits to students. In autumn 2020, the Finnish Immigration Service issued guidance on handling the cases of potential victims of human trafficking. The aim of this guidance is to promote the consistent application of the Aliens Act when processing asylum or residence permit applications submitted by potential victims of human trafficking. The guidance highlights specific issues related to children, such as tracing a guardian and making a child welfare notification. It also states that in the best interests of the child, a child should not be returned to conditions in which they have been exploited, or if the return would pose a risk of exploitation.²⁵

The Finnish Immigration Service's guide also specifies that trafficking in children constitutes a serious violation of the child's fundamental rights, such as the right to life, survival and development, as well as the right to protection from violence, child labor, abduction, sale, and trafficking. According to the guidance, the impacts of human trafficking must be assessed in a child-friendly manner, and the assessment must take into account potential reactions from the community, such as rejection, exclusion, and discrimination of the victim.²⁶

Seri Support Centres for Victims of Sexual Assault are support units for people over 16 years of age who have experienced sexual violence. There are currently 25 Seri Support Centers in Finland. They were established to fulfill the obligations of the Istanbul Convention. The Center's services include forensic sampling, an overall assessment of the situation, testing for sexually transmitted diseases, psychological support, and a follow-up treatment plan. They also offer support in initiating a legal process, however, filing a report is not a requirement for receiving treatment. The service is free of charge and available within a month of the assault. Children under the age of 16 receive care in children's hospital (emergency) units.²⁷ According to a doctor working at the Helsinki Seri Support Centre, they have had patients who are victims of human trafficking.²⁸

3.2. Civil society organisations

Outreach work and low-threshold services provided by the third sector play a significant role in identifying victims of human trafficking and thereby in addressing trafficking itself. The third sector provides low-threshold services for children and adolescents and reaches young people

²⁵ Kainulainen & Valovirta 2021, 24.

²⁶ Kainulainen & Valovirta 2021, 26.

²⁷ <https://thl.fi/aiheet/vakivalta/apua-ja-palveluja/seri-tukikeskus-seksuaalivakivallan-uhreille>; <https://www.hus.fi/en/patient/hospitals-and-other-units/womens-hospital/seri-support-center-victims-sexual-assault> (Accessed 26 May 2025).

²⁸ Jompero / Helsingin Uutiset 2020.



through outreach activities. The third sector can also help build trust toward authorities in the case of children.²⁹

Non-governmental organisations Victim Support Finland, MONIKA – Multicultural Women’s Association Finland, the Finnish Refugee Advice Centre and Pro-tukipiste together make up a network of anti-trafficking cooperation (Neliapilajärjestöt, “Four-Leaf Clover Associations”) established in 2015. The network helps victims of human trafficking and similar crimes, increases awareness of the identification of vulnerabilities associated with human trafficking, advocates for the rights and status of the victims, and seeks to ensure sufficient support services that meet the needs of victims.

Victim Support Finland has offered specialised services for victims of human trafficking and labour exploitation since 2015. The role of Victim Support Finland in advocating for trafficking victims’ rights has grown much more important in the past five years, and their number of clients has also significantly increased. They have identified a growing number of young people who have been exploited when they were children, but who only sought for assistance when they became adults.³⁰ RIKU provides services in all regions of Finland.

MONIKA – Multicultural Women’s Association Finland (Monika-naiset ry) is an umbrella organisation of multicultural women’s organisations that helps and supports women in different languages. They run a crisis centre, a shelter and integration services and offer support to victims of trafficking, forced marriage, domestic violence and other abuse. Their services also cover children of the victims, and they regularly identify e.g. cases of forced marriage, which according to Finnish legislation is a form of human trafficking.

Pro-counselling centre (Pro-tukipiste) provides low-threshold support, counselling and health services as well as community activities to sex workers, people offering transactional sex or people involved in erotic industries, including victims of trafficking. They offer services in Helsinki, Tampere and Turku.

The Finnish Refugee Advice Centre provides legal aid and advice to asylum seekers, refugees and other foreigners in Finland. The Refugee Advice Centre’s lawyers are specialised in investigating the situations of potential human trafficking victims and assist them in all processes related to their situation involving the Finnish authorities. They also offer services for undocumented migrants.

Save the Children Finland operates a service called “Net tip-off” (Nettivistä), where anyone can leave a tip-off if they suspect that they have encountered activity or material related to child sexual abuse, including trafficking of children for sexual exploitation. Professionals will check the tip and forward knowledge about any illegal activity to the National Bureau of Investigation. A child protection notification can also be made, if there is enough information to do so. In 2024, the service received 8,615 tip-offs.³¹

3.3. Coordination and cooperation

The Government Anti-Trafficking Coordinator was appointed in 2014, and the post was assigned to the Police Department of the Ministry of the Interior. In 2018, the Ministry of the

²⁹ Nuotio 2025, 78.

³⁰ Pihlaja & Piipponen 2023.

³¹ Pelastakaa Lapset 2024.



Interior commissioned an evaluation on the Government's mechanisms of coordination and reporting on issues of human trafficking which concluded that the anti-trafficking coordination work was not as effective as hoped. It was suggested that the Anti-Trafficking Coordinator should become a permanent position, and the coordinator would need a team partner to assist in their duties.³² After the review was completed, the post of the Anti-Trafficking Coordinator was transferred to the Ministry of Justice and became a joint position of the Government, pursuant to the Government Programme.³³ In 2022, ministerial working group decided that the coordination of anti-trafficking work within the Government would become permanent, and that the function would be under the Ministry of Justice also in the future.³⁴

The National Referral Mechanism (NRM) was released in 2025 in the form of a concrete handbook. The handbook and e-learning materials provide a clear model for practitioners who may identify trafficked persons, including children, in their line of work and outline the next steps in their referral to services, and the organization of services and care for them. The aim of NRM is to ensure the rights of victims of human trafficking and guarantee the identification and access to the needed services nationally. The handbook emphasizes the importance of timely identification and victim assistance which increases the victim's trust in the professionals around them which reduces the risk of re-victimisation and helps to ensure that the victim will not return to their exploiter. The handbook and the e-training materials provide information and support to different actors in the identification and assistance of victims of human trafficking.³⁵ The NRM will be officially adopted in 2025.

In the Helsinki region, a multidisciplinary network consisting of professionals who encounter children and youth in their work was established in 2022 as a result of the need to increase the understanding of trafficking in children and youth and to develop multidisciplinary co-operation. Approximately 15 professionals actively participate in the network, including representatives from the social and health care services in Helsinki, child welfare, after-care services, youth work, the NGO Victim Support Finland, Helsinki police department, Eastern Uusimaa police department, and the National Bureau of Investigation as well as pupil welfare. The working group has strived to look into various issues, lessons learned and good practices related to, for example, the prevention of exploitation, identification and assistance to child and youth victims.³⁶

Anchor work (*ankkuritoiminta*) is a practice consisting of multidisciplinary collaboration aimed at promoting the well-being of adolescents, preventing crime, and breaking any cycle of criminal behavior. A multi-professional anchor team includes experts from the police as well as from social, health, and youth services. The team meets young persons and their families as early as possible, so that the adolescents can be supported in their life situations and, if necessary, referred to other essential help or support services. Anchor work began in Hämeenlinna in the early 2000s and has since expanded through effective methods and good practices into a nationwide operating model. The anchor work development group has produced a handbook aimed at supporting the implementation, development, and evaluation of anchor work in Finland. Although anchor work is based on common national principles and

³² Ministry of the Interior 2018, 19, 31–37.

³³ Finnish Government 2019.

³⁴ Ministry of Justice 2022.

³⁵ Nuotio 2025; see also eOppiva & Ministry of Justice 2025.

³⁶ Pihlaja 2024a; Council of Europe 2025.



objectives, it is organized at the regional level to address the needs and special characteristics of each area and region.³⁷

Over 10,000 children become victims of suspected violent crimes and sexual offences every year in Finland.³⁸ The Lasta model is an inter-agency cooperation model aimed at ensuring information exchange and multidisciplinary collaboration between authorities when there is a suspicion of a child being subjected to a violent crime or a sexual offence.³⁹ The idea behind the model is the comprehensive collection of background information by the police, social services, and health care using the Lasta form, as well as the organisation of regular multi-agency meetings to discuss the cases.⁴⁰ According to interviewees in a 2023 study, a key factor regarding the model is that the preliminary information is collected in a multi-professional manner, and specifically, that social welfare information is screened by a social services professional, and healthcare information by a healthcare professional. This approach not only frees up police resources to focus on their core tasks but also helps ensure that essential social and healthcare information and perspectives are taken into account in criminal investigation decisions.⁴¹

According to the study, however, as the Lasta screening model has expanded, multiple regional variations in its implementation have emerged.⁴² They differ significantly from one another concerning, for example, the professionals involved, the scope of the screening activities, the frequency of meetings, the background information used, and the use of the Lasta form. The differences raise the question of whether one can speak of a single, unified Lasta screening model. Although regions have been encouraged to adapt the model to local conditions, variations in implementation also create challenges. One of the core goals of the Lasta model is to ensure that children receive high-quality and equal services regardless of where they live. Based on the study, significant differences in practices may increase the risk of inconsistent treatment of children in suspected abuse cases.⁴³

4. Child trafficking in context

4.1. Patterns and trends

Between 1 January 2020 and 30 June 2023, nearly 70 children were admitted into the National Assistance System for Victims of Trafficking (NAS). They had been subjected to different forms of exploitation, including forced labour, sexual exploitation, forced marriage, and exploitation in begging and in criminal activity. None of them were Finnish citizens, and most were referred to the NAS during their asylum process.⁴⁴ It seems that victims of Finnish background mainly become clients of the NAS only after reaching adulthood, even if the exploitation had taken place or started when they were minors.⁴⁵

³⁷ Ankkuritoiminta n.d.

³⁸ Sosiaali- ja terveysministeriö 2023.

³⁹ Fadjukoff, Hautamäki, Hakala & Ellonen 2023, 14.

⁴⁰ Fadjukoff & Ellonen 2023, 2.

⁴¹ Fadjukoff, Hautamäki, Hakala & Ellonen 2023, 90–91.

⁴² Ibid., 44.

⁴³ Ibid., 44–45.

⁴⁴ Valovirta & Kainulainen 2024, 12.

⁴⁵ Valovirta & Kainulainen 2024, 12; Kervinen & Ollus 2019, 95–96; Pihlaja & Piipponen 2023, 67.



In 2023, 326 new clients were admitted into the NAS, 11 of whom were underaged (potential) victims, and 36 the children of adult victims. Most of the 11 had been victims of forced labour. In a total of 208 cases the exploitation had taken place in Finland, and in one of these cases the victim was an underaged girl, while the rest were adults. On 31 Dec 2023, there were a total of 1,536 clients in the Assistance System, 19 of whom were children and 105 of whom had been admitted into the NAS when they were minors. 276 clients were children of adult victims.⁴⁶ In 2024, 207 new clients were admitted into the NAS, 10 of whom (5%) were underaged (potential) victims, and 23 the children of adult victims.⁴⁷

There are no statistics available on how many victims of child trafficking are being assisted by regional well-being counties, if the children have not been referred to NAS. Their experience may not be processed under the trafficking label, but rather e.g. under sexual offences by the child protection services. The interviewed experts pointed out that child trafficking in particular is a hidden form of criminality, and the real figures are likely to be much higher than suggested by official statistics. Kervinen and Ollus, for example, suggest that since based on police data, the number of cases of sexual abuse and aggravated sexual abuse of a child reported to the authorities by far exceeds the number of cases of trafficking, some of them could upon closer examination also show signs of human trafficking.⁴⁸

The following table and graph 1. made based on the table show the number of clients within the system each year. Please note that clients may stay within the system for more than one year, i.e., the numbers here do not portray the number of new clients admitted per year.

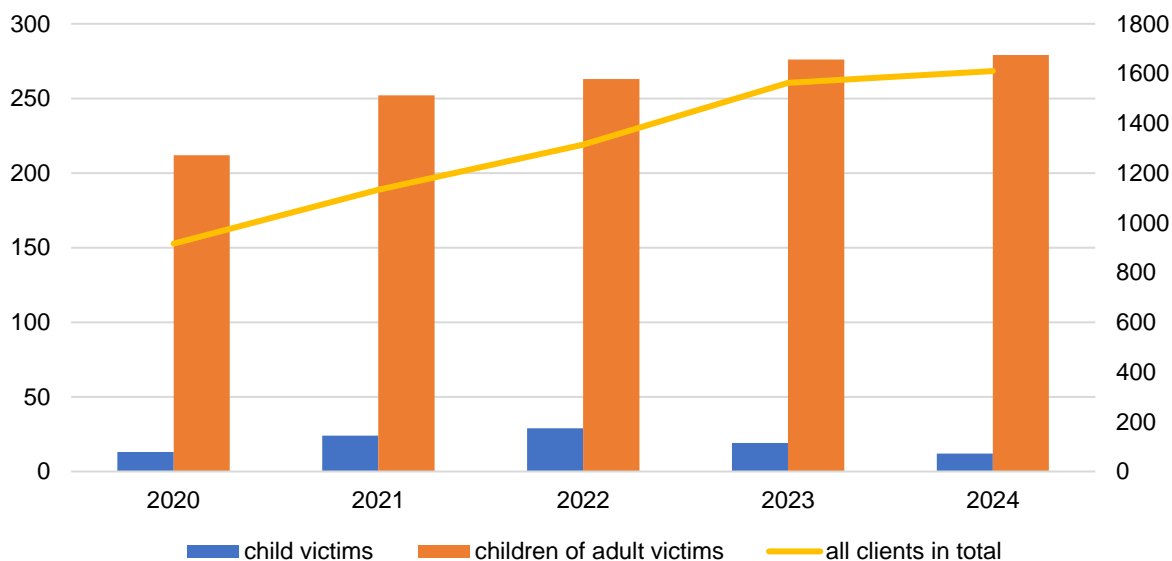
year	child victims	children of adult victims	all clients in total
2020	13	212	916
2021	24	252	1132
2022	29	263	1314
2023	19	276	1563
2024	12	279	1610

⁴⁶ Ihmiskaupan uhrien auttamisjärjestelmä 2023.

⁴⁷ Ihmiskaupan uhrien auttamisjärjestelmä 2024.

⁴⁸ Kervinen & Ollus 2019, 42.

Clients in the NAS 2020–2024



Graph 1. The number of child victims, adult victims’ children, and all clients in total in the Assistance System of Human Trafficking in 2020–2024.⁴⁹ N.B. the graph contains two scales: the left one indicates the no. of child victims and victims’ children, and the right one the total no. of clients.

Regarding the year 2025, the Assistance System has released statistics for the first six months. During this time, 102 new clients were admitted to the NAS, six of whom were (potential) child victims, and 14 children of adult victims.⁵⁰

Valovirta and Kainulainen analysed 35 human trafficking convictions concerning children given by the district courts and courts of appeal in 2012–2024. In most of the cases the children had been subjected to sexual exploitation. This often involved continued and serious sexual violence that was highly traumatic to the child. The convictions indicated that, in some cases, the children had also been subjected to commercial sexual exploitation by more than one person. Some cases also involved forced labour or subjecting a child to conditions that violate human dignity.⁵¹ The plaintiff was usually a teenage girl and the defendant an adult man.⁵²

Interviewed law enforcement officer outlined that they are identifying more cyber-facilitated or cyber-initiated cases involving children who have been subjected to psychological control and manipulation which has then escalated to actual exploitation.

Cyber-facilitated cases where the child has been brought into a situation like that where they haven’t really been able to influence their own situation in any way, or have been under coercive control from the perpetrator’s side, even if it has taken place online. Cases like that, and including ones where it has progressed into something physical. Like into a situation of abuse of trust and sexual exploitation. So, the purpose of the

⁴⁹ Ihmiskaupan uhrien auttamisjärjestelmä 2024; 2023; 2022; 2021; 2020.

⁵⁰ Ihmiskaupan uhrien auttamisjärjestelmä 2025, 6.

⁵¹ Valovirta & Kainulainen 2024, 5.

⁵² Valovirta & Kainulainen 2024, 60.

contact online in the first place was the sexual exploitation of the child, which then was carried out. – Expert interview 10.

According to the European Union Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment 2025 (EU-SOCTA), organised criminal groups also target vulnerable youth to recruit them into committing crimes such as drug trafficking, cyber-attacks, online fraud and violent extortion. The recruitment takes place on social media platforms and messaging apps. Finland takes part in Europol's Operational Task Force GRIMM which aims to tackle youth recruitment into organized crime and the trend of violence-as-a-service.⁵³

The Com is an internationally active online community that exploits children and young people and is known for the extremely violent blackmail and exploitation methods used by its members.⁵⁴ Europol has underlined that particularly vulnerable youth aged 8 to 17, such as LGBTQ+, ethnic minorities and individuals with mental health issues are at the high risk of becoming victims.⁵⁵ The Finnish police is currently investigating a case under aggravated trafficking involving a Finnish child where the perpetrator is member of the group "764", which is a part of The Com network.⁵⁶ 764 is known for their extremely torturous methods of child abuse and the group has been associated with sadistic, satanic elements.⁵⁷

FBI and Europol have issued warnings of these online networks of predators.⁵⁸ The Finnish police have also expressed concern about the Com network's impact in Finland.⁵⁹ Internationally, there are several hundred cases under investigation in which young people have harmed and killed others or committed suicide under the influence of The Com network.⁶⁰ The Com ties children and young people tightly to the exploitation, and victims have little opportunity to report it or break free from it.

Finally, focus group discussion of NGO representatives as well as some expert interviewees brought up the issue of so-called missing children, including the situation of children who taken abroad by their parents, or by one parent without permission from the other, or by another adult altogether. According to an NGO representative, it is not difficult to take a child abroad, as checks at (EU) borders are often non-existent or minimal. Risks associated with this may include using the child for the transportation of drugs; taking the (potentially underaged and/or unwilling) child abroad to marry; or sending the child to, typically, the parents' country of origin for a "disciplinary trip" in order to change some type of unwanted behaviour. According to the Finnish Crisis Response Association, on these disciplinary trips, children usually stay with their relatives or in a disciplinary institution specifically established specifically for the purpose, where the aim is to reshape the child's thinking, identity or behaviour with violent methods.⁶¹

⁵³ Europol 2025a.

⁵⁴ Europol 2025b; Royal Canadian Mounted Police 2024.

⁵⁵ Europol 2025b.

⁵⁶ Poliisi 2025a; Poliisi 2025b; see also e.g., Lapinkangas / Ilta-Sanomat 2025; Juonala / Ilta-Sanomat 2025.

⁵⁷ The Guardian 2025; Poliisi 2025b.

⁵⁸ FBI 2023; Europol 2025b; see also The Guardian 2025.

⁵⁹ Poliisi 2025b.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Mohamed & Poikolainen 2024.

4.2. Victim profile and groups at risk

Focus group discussions and expert interviews as well as previous literature indicate that children and young people are vulnerable especially to sexual exploitation. This includes children of Finnish background or citizenship as well as children with migrant background.

Children and young people with a refugee or asylum seeker background, including unaccompanied children may be subjected to human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation on their way to Finland. Smugglers have sexually abused children in exchange for transportation or for continuing to the next leg of the trip. Children have also been used as “payment” for smuggling or a means of extorting money from the parents. Some children have also been exploited in forced labour in a transit country before allowing them to continue their journey.⁶² In broad terms, child victims of labour exploitation are often boys, victims of child marriage are often girls, and child victims of sexual exploitation are of all genders, although more victims who are girls seem to have been identified.⁶³

Pihlaja and Piipponen published a report in 2023 on the victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation who had been clients at the special support service for victims of trafficking at Victim Support Finland between 1 Nov 2022 and 31 Jan 2023 (N=184, 90 of whom were victims of forced marriage and 94 victims of other sexual exploitation). In 96% of the examined cases the exploitation had taken place in Finland (or it had begun abroad and continued in Finland).⁶⁴ Of the clients, 29% had been under the age of 18 when the trafficking crime had taken place. Out of them, 25% had first disclosed their situation and gotten help only after becoming of age.⁶⁵

Forced marriage is currently the second most commonly identified form of trafficking according to statistics from NAS.⁶⁶ Cases of forced marriage in Finland have involved young people, mostly girls, with a migrant background who live in Finland and are sent to their home country to be married to a local man; couples with migrant backgrounds who have been married elsewhere, and the exploitation in the marriage takes place in Finland; and men with migrant backgrounds living in Finland who find a young spouse in their home country and get married in the home country or in Finland.⁶⁷ In cases where young girls have been forced to marry, they may have already been subjected to honor-related violence and intense pressure and control by their (extended) family, and if the girls have disobeyed the family’s rules or begun dating, marriage may be forced upon them in order to preserve the honor of the girl, and thereby, of the family. In some cases, marriage may be used as a way to acquire residence in Finland through family reunification.⁶⁸

Circumstances comparable to forced marriage can also occur between Finnish nationals. These situations may, for example, be connected to the practices of a close-knit or closed religious community.⁶⁹ Young people in Finnish religious communities have been coerced into

⁶² Kervinen & Ollus 2019, 74–75.

⁶³ Kervinen & Ollus 2019, 61, 75, 96, see also Pihlaja & Piipponen 2023, 15.

⁶⁴ Pihlaja & Piipponen 2023, 9.

⁶⁵ Pihlaja & Piipponen 2023, 15.

⁶⁶ Ihmiskaupan uhrien auttamisjärjestelmä 2024, 6.

⁶⁷ Kervinen & Ollus 2019, 61–63, see also Toivonen 2017; Kainulainen & Valovirta 2021, 38–39.

⁶⁸ Kervinen & Ollus 2019, 61–63.

⁶⁹ Lehtinen & Rossi 2022, 129.

marriage, and getting a divorce has been made very difficult by e.g., labelling it as something that will lead to being ostracised from the community.⁷⁰

Within families where, e.g., honor-related violence takes place, boys exercising control over their siblings may also be closely controlled themselves by fathers and uncles. An interviewed law enforcement officer saw this as an aspect that is still at the discussion stage and should be investigated more often.

A potentially high-risk group are children who have run away from or do not return to foster care (so-called runaways). They were frequently mentioned in the expert and focus group interviews as being vulnerable to multiple forms of exploitation. Running away from a place of care repeatedly seems to correlate with criminal behaviour, and furthermore, it increases the risk of exploitation, because children on the run often have limited funds to buy basic necessities (and in some cases, drugs) and may be exploited when trying to acquire them.⁷¹ According to a 2019 PhD study by Isoniemi, in a sample set of 200 Finnish cases of runaways every third child (n=64) committed a crime and every tenth child (n=20) became a victim of a crime during the time they spent on the run from a care facility. Those victimized had mainly experienced sexual and physical assaults (incl. sexual abuse of a child (4 counts); purchase of sexual services from a young person and aggravated sexual abuse of a child (3 counts)). Due to the sensitive nature of these crimes, it is likely that many are never brought to the attention of the police.⁷²

The 2023 report by Haapala, Kaijanen, Minkkinen and Westerlund on children missing from foster care examined the forms of exploitation and violence these children had been subjected to. While on the run, children had faced violence and sexual abuse, committed and witnessed crimes, and had sex in exchange for drugs, alcohol or accommodation. Many had feared for their own or a close one's safety, been threatened, and been pressured into doing something against their will (for instance by exploiting the child's lack of accommodation). Interviewed professionals stated that runaway children are "easy targets" for those looking to sexually exploit them or exploit them in criminal activities in exchange for accommodation or money. In some cases, older teens have pandered younger runaways.⁷³

Kekkonen and Pekkarinen (2024) conducted a study based on the same data as Haapala and colleagues. Based on survey data the authors created an indicator to examine the risk of human trafficking risk among children who have run away from foster care.⁷⁴ They found, e.g., that the risk of trafficking and related crimes concerned girls in particular, and those who had been previously raped were in the middle to high-risk category for trafficking as well. Furthermore, risk factors for human trafficking increased in cases where children on the run were staying at strangers' homes or other unfamiliar locations.⁷⁵ Expert interviewees also mentioned that children with cognitive disabilities or mental health problems are at heightened risk, as well as children who are abducted by their parents abroad.

⁷⁰ E.g., Malinen / Helsingin Sanomat 2021; Söderlund & Westergård / Yle 2025; Koskinen 2024.

⁷¹ Isoniemi 2019, 110, 123.

⁷² Isoniemi 2019, 160–161.

⁷³ Haapala et al. 2023, 115, 118–119, 122, 188.

⁷⁴ Kekkonen & Pekkarinen 2024, 26.

⁷⁵ Kekkonen & Pekkarinen 2024, 27–29.

Criminal exploitation of children and the challenges of identification were discussed in the expert and focus group interviews as a particular challenge. Especially law enforcement officers pointed out that it is difficult to get the person to talk to be able to identify whether they have acted according to their own will or if there is someone behind the exploitation.

From what I've understood, especially from talking to people doing outreach youth work and others working with young people outside of official authorities, a major issue is that the youth don't want to talk about being recruited, tricked, or forced into something. That may partly reflect a desire among young people to assert their own agency. If someone has spent their whole life in the child welfare system, being moved from place to place with very little control over their own life, they might want to reclaim some of that agency.

And of course, there's also the real or perceived fear of what might happen if they do speak up. That's completely understandable – if someone has committed crimes themselves, they probably have to be in a pretty tight spot before they start talking about those crimes and expose the people behind it all. – Expert interview 12

According to Pihlaja (2024; 2025), the identification of human trafficking should be improved especially in situations where it is likely that the child or young person has been the victim of abuse or is suspected of having committed crimes themselves.⁷⁶ Pihlaja also points out that reluctance of children and young people to disclose their actions to the police is not solely due to the lack of trust or interviewing techniques, but stems from a broader structural issue: the means to protect a child or young person from retaliation or other potential negative consequences of speaking out are extremely limited or non-existent. If a child or young person feels that the criminal justice system is unable to intervene effectively and promptly or to punish the perpetrators, they may perceive the risks of speaking out as greater than the benefits of doing so.⁷⁷

Instances of forced criminality have been identified in Finland concerning e.g., drug offenses and theft. The exploiters have blackmailed and intimidated the victims into more crime by threatening to tell the authorities what the child has done.⁷⁸ A young person struggling with substance abuse may be pressured or forced into criminal activities to repay debts incurred through drug use. Children may also be made to commit crimes because those under the age of 15 cannot be held criminally responsible.⁷⁹

According to the Finnish Police, the youngest perpetrators of crime are not always lured into crime by adults, rather some of them may have adopted a “criminal lifestyle” independently. This was also mentioned by experts working in the field of social and victim services. Children may also buy violent “services” from other children (e.g., pay another child to threaten their victim).⁸⁰ For example, in a recent case, a minor drug dealer aged 17 is suspected of drug-related crimes as well as extortion after allegedly coercing a couple of his peers into selling drugs on his behalf, in order to pay back inflated drug-related debts.⁸¹

⁷⁶ Pihlaja 2024a; 2025.

⁷⁷ Pihlaja 2025, 422.

⁷⁸ Kervinen & Ollus 2019, 67.

⁷⁹ Lehtinen & Rossi 2022, 128.

⁸⁰ Ikola / Helsingin Sanomat 2025.

⁸¹ Salomaa / Helsingin Sanomat 2025.

A recent article by Helsingin Sanomat explored the role of girls and the exploitation they face in the criminal underworld. Criminal men may protect themselves by making their girlfriends carry the drugs. Some offer drugs in exchange for shelter and sex, assault the girls, commit fraud, or take out loans in the girls' name and leave the debts for them to handle. Young girls may be targeted for this type of financial exploitation because they often have creditworthiness.⁸² The issue was also discussed in the focus groups and expert interviews. An interviewed expert working in the field of social and victim services also noted that girls are often in quite a weak position in these kind of groups.

For example, the position of girls in these youth groups is weak, and there's this kind of... I was speaking with a youth worker while trying to find out more about one particular group where a lot of crimes have occurred. It's known that there have been girls involved too, and I was trying to locate one specific girl who had been in certain situations – she's small and blonde – and the youth worker just said, "They're all small and blonde, and none of them have names. They're constantly changing." So basically, these girls are being passed around within the group, and they don't have a voice or a role in it. – Expert interview 2.

Two survivors were interviewed in the Helsingin Sanomat article, both of whom now do youth work with girls in similar situations. They recognize a pattern: girls start dating feared men from the drug scene, thinking that they are then safe or in control of the situation like "criminal princesses". Furthermore, youth workers have noticed that groups of men hang around in Helsinki city center, who offer drugs or alcohol to girls and expect sex in return. Some men also lure girls into exploitation through social media, e.g., Snapchat. They may promise the girls €500 in exchange for their online banking codes, as even empty accounts can be used for money laundering.⁸³

According to the Helsingin Sanomat interviewees, girls exploited by criminals often share a similar background which includes traumatic experiences, parents with substance abuse problems, domestic violence, and often neuropsychiatric or mental health problems.⁸⁴ This was confirmed by expert interviewees, who emphasized also the risk of re-victimization and intergenerational violence as background factors. Many girls lack normal, affectionate relationships and a safe father. Control, violence and being "instrumentalized" in crime become entangled with love in the girls' minds, and many think they deserve the abuse. Girls on the run from foster care are particularly vulnerable.⁸⁵

Children that have been forced to fight in wars have been identified in Finland, i.e., children who were child soldiers in their country of origin. Recruitment of boys as foreign combatants has also been reported.⁸⁶

According to the National Bureau of Investigation, a woman with Finnish-Russian dual citizenship is suspected of the aggravated trafficking of her own children, because she took her underaged children from Finland to Isis-controlled areas during the Syrian civil war in 2014, thereby placing them in circumstances contrary to human dignity. Later, the family was placed

⁸² Kuokkanen / Helsingin Sanomat 2025.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Kervinen & Ollus 2019, 71, see also Lehtinen & Rossi 2022, 129.

on al-Hol camp. The woman and two of her children have since returned to Finland, but an unknown number of the woman's children stayed in Syria. The children living in Finland, now adults, are the plaintiffs in the case.⁸⁷

Some concern has also been raised in relation to the business of bringing in underaged upper secondary school students to rural Finnish schools from abroad, from countries such as Uzbekistan, Vietnam, Myanmar, Thailand, China and Iran.⁸⁸ According to an interviewed expert in the field of social and victim services, they have encountered these students in relation to a few criminal cases. The first step would usually be to contact the child's parents, but because these children have come to the country alone and live either alone or with peers in e.g., dormitories, reaching the parents can be a challenge. The students have no home municipality, so the amount of information on them available to the authorities is very limited.

4.3. Factors leading to vulnerability

The interviewed experts and focus group participants referred to various aspects of vulnerability which may increase the risk of exploitation. Most often mentioned aspects were related to young age, family instability and previous trauma, lack of life experience, reduced ability to evaluate risks as well as substance abuse problems, behavioral issues, and neuropsychiatric disorders. Also children of victims of trafficking were mentioned by several expert interviewees as particularly vulnerable. Perpetrators are well-reversed in identifying vulnerabilities and abusing them in such a way that the victims do not disclose their experiences to others due to e.g. fear of consequences.

By conducting a survey and interviews with experts working with children and adolescents, Kervinen and Ollus (2019) identified the following vulnerability factors: prior abuse and vulnerable emotional state; children's unawareness of risks and dangers, risky behaviour; substance abuse; poor mental health or slight disability; unstable family situation or no family around; poverty in the family; residing in the country without a guardian; being on the run from home or from a (foster) care facility; social exclusion; and lack of support and insufficient identification of potential victims. Often, different factors accumulate in cases of exploitation and trafficking.⁸⁹ Lack of language skills, poor or lack of education, being illiterate, having a physical and psychological illness have also been mentioned in relation to increased vulnerability to trafficking.⁹⁰

Children and young people who grew up in substitute care have often encountered various types of violence and serious physical and emotional neglect during placements.⁹¹ This was confirmed by interviewed experts and focus group participants. Particularly so-called runaways and minors who live without a guardian or permanent residence are vulnerable to criminal exploitation.⁹² In his 2019 study Isoniemi found that often, cases of children running away from care institutions are seen as unauthorized absences and registered within the police as requests for assistance instead of as missing persons' reports. Situations between these types of absences and missing persons' cases often involve similar risk factors, but how the police

⁸⁷ Kallionpää / Helsingin Sanomat 2025.

⁸⁸ Ruissalo et. al. / Yle 2024; Toivonen / Yle 2025.

⁸⁹ Kervinen & Ollus 2019, 43–44, 55–57, 80–85.

⁹⁰ Kainulainen & Valovirta 2021, 78–81.

⁹¹ Hytönen et al. 2016.

⁹² Lehtinen & Rossi 2022, 128.

respond to each differs greatly. This is seen by Isoniemi as problematic considering the principle of the best interest of the child.⁹³ The risk of falling victim to exploitation or crime is heightened by factors such as lack of language skills, an unfamiliar environment, and lack of financial resources.⁹⁴

During periods of unauthorised absence, the range of criminal activity and victimisation spans the entire spectrum of criminal offences, from minor property crimes to homicide. In this respect, unauthorised absence represents a dangerous situation, in which both preliminary information and the timing of return should be given particular attention. Moreover, the first instance of unauthorised absence is often an indicator of recurrence, although only 8–10 per cent of children in care leave without permission.⁹⁵

Analysis of residence permit decisions regarding trafficking victims by Kainulainen and Valovirta (2021) found that the loss of one's parents during childhood had exposed children, both boys and girls, to forced labor in their country of origin or during their migratory journey. The analysed decisions described how relatives had taken the child into their home but treated them poorly. The child was not necessarily allowed to attend school but was instead forced to work either at home or outside the home. Basic needs were not adequately met, and the child had not received sufficient food or other care. The child was often subjected to both physical and psychological violence.⁹⁶ The decisions revealed that the applicants had not necessarily perceived themselves as a victim of forced labor during childhood. However, human trafficking or indicators of it were later identified when their treatment was examined from the perspective of the rights of the child, or by taking into account how those responsible for the child's care had exploited the child's vulnerable and dependent position for their own financial gain.⁹⁷

Kainulainen and Valovirta also found in their study on residence permit decisions that victims of sexual exploitation were mainly women and girls who had been exploited in their country of origin or during their migratory journey, or their previous country of destination. Many had experienced a disrupted childhood, which exposed them to mistreatment. Several of the women had already suffered sexual violence and abuse during their childhood. In some cases, the incident appeared to be a single act of violence, while for others, the sexual abuse had been repeated and long-term. The victim may have attempted to speak out about what had happened but was not believed. Some were reported to have fled the abuse while still children. When a child or young person had been left without the care of their parents or relatives, they were in an especially vulnerable position, which exposed them to further exploitation. The analysed decisions also included accounts of young girls who had escaped forced marriages. While homeless, a young girl encountered an adult who seemed to offer her safety and protection and had then forced them into prostitution.⁹⁸

The 2024 study by Valovirta and Kainulainen which looked into 35 court cases of child trafficking found that exploitation often took place in close, trust based and/or intimate relationships, which increased the child's dependence on the defendant. Previous life

⁹³ Isoniemi 2019, 125.

⁹⁴ Isoniemi 2024, 69.

⁹⁵ Isoniemi 2024, 69.

⁹⁶ Kainulainen & Valovirta 2021, 55–56.

⁹⁷ Kainulainen & Valovirta 2021, 55–56.

⁹⁸ Kainulainen & Valovirta 2021, 59–60.

experiences and mental health issues were also cited as attributes increasing child victims' vulnerability.⁹⁹

Similarly, in the study by Pihlaja and Piipponen concerning clients of Victim Support Finland who had faced sexual exploitation, all cases (both with adult and child victims) involved psychological control, subjugation, and the victim being in a dependent status in relation to the perpetrator. These features resulted in a situation where the victim felt that they could not escape the situation without serious consequences.¹⁰⁰ A young age alone did not increase a person's likelihood of being exploited, however, when paired with another factor of vulnerability, there seemed to be a greater risk for trafficking and more difficulties in leaving the situation. In cases of forced marriage, a young age together with honor-related control and violence, the role of family and community in shaping one's life choices, and unawareness of one's own rights were risk factors for exploitation. In cases of sexual violence, childhood experiences of exploitation, mental health challenges, a difficult family situation, intergenerational violence, etc. seemed to expose young people to exploitation. Most often the exploiter was either a boyfriend, a person posing as a trustworthy adult, or the client's own group of friends. Many victims had not realized that they were being seriously exploited, because the perpetrator was someone they trusted and some felt like they were also profiting from, e.g., selling sexual services.¹⁰¹

Underaged victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation stated that reasons preventing them from seeking help included psychological control and threats; unawareness of their situation; potential consequences of disclosure such as a child welfare placement or the restrictive measures at an institutional care facility; solidarity towards the abuser or the exploitative friend group; and being ashamed for getting into the situation. Underaged victims of forced marriage were trapped in the situation also because of honor-related violence; dependency on the husband, family and community; and the fear of bringing shame to one's own family.¹⁰²

5. Practical aspects of anti-trafficking efforts

5.1. Detection, investigation and prosecution

Detection

Detection of child victims of trafficking is challenging according to interviewed experts and focus group participants. The interviewed experts noted that children may be unaware of or unable to describe the situation they are in, or to see it as exploitative in the first place. Some may even blame themselves for ending up in a situation of exploitation. Law enforcement officers in particular mentioned that it may be difficult to get young people to talk openly about their situation. Moreover, the perpetrators will actively avoid attracting attention to the exploitation that is taking place and they may have threatened the victims or instructed them not to talk or to tell a previously agreed story about the situation. One interviewed law enforcement officer noted that often times children and young people are encountered by police patrol units who may lack expertise to identify indicators of trafficking.

⁹⁹ Valovirta & Kainulainen 2024, 5, 59.

¹⁰⁰ Pihlaja & Piipponen 2023, 20–21.

¹⁰¹ Pihlaja & Piipponen 2023, 67–68.

¹⁰² Pihlaja & Piipponen 2023, 69.

Those police officers who deal with these young people, of course, can't really have any special training in human trafficking issues. Because they have to handle the whole range of duties in emergency response. And, you know, the situations can look like it's just a young person committing petty crimes or stuck in a cycle of offending, or something like that. But there could be much bigger things going on in the background, and I don't know how well those are recognised. – Expert interview 4.

NGO representatives noted that young people may not want to talk to officials about their experiences because of fear of consequences for themselves and/or their friends. Furthermore, when perpetrators are family members, they may be able to hide the situation by lying convincingly to the authorities. The exploitation may unfold through the child's own disclosure, or individuals working at the police, child welfare services, the school, or in health care may notice signs that alert them to the situation. Officials have a duty to notify the well-being countries if a child's need for care, circumstances endangering their development, or their behavior require investigation. When suspecting sexual abuse or a crime against the life and health of a child (e.g., human trafficking), officials must notify the police.¹⁰³

According to Pihlaja (2024), there are shortcomings in the identification of human trafficking involving children and young people and in understanding the diversity of different types of exploitation which children and young people may be subjected to. Indeed, trafficking in children and young people can appear as many types of exploitation and cases are not always limited to one form of exploitation – one case may involve several different forms of abuse.¹⁰⁴ This was also discussed in the expert interviews, as pointed out by an expert working in the field of social and victim services.

People with multiple problems – it's like this big tangled mess, you know, and I don't believe I've ever seen a case where it was just one thing. Like, "Oh hey, this young person has been a victim of sexual abuse". No, it's always a big web of issues. There are several different challenges involved, and at the same time the young person might have engaged in some kind of problematic behaviour themselves – using or selling substances, assaults, crimes, or just general acting out – and then also been subjected to abuse. – Expert interview 7.

Also for example forced labour cases were mentioned as potentially challenging to identify in the expert interviews, as children and young people may work at a family business e.g. a restaurant without any wages being paid to them as pointed out by interviewed law enforcement officer:

One big thing, kind of like a black hole for us, is work related exploitation involving children. "Work" in quotes again, because rarely do the children get paid for it, but still, to some extent. It happens especially in those family-run businesses in the food service sector or similar, where the whole family takes part – and then you have a child working from morning till night. Washing dishes, cleaning, and homework gets left undone. So yeah, those cases can definitely remain hidden, I believe. – Expert interview 5.

¹⁰³ Kervinen & Ollus 2019, 86–88; Child Welfare Act (417/2007, 5:25 & 25a).

¹⁰⁴ Pihlaja 2024a, 57.

Often, children and youth who have been victims of human trafficking have been in the scope of compulsory education, clients of child welfare or other social welfare services, have lived in a reception centre or substitute care, used health care services, met youth workers or visited services provided by low-threshold organisations, but their situation of exploitation has not been identified by any of the professionals involved.¹⁰⁵ This was also discussed in the expert interviews and focus groups, and many practitioners pointed out challenges in detecting signs of trafficking in situations involving children of different backgrounds and vulnerabilities. Children in such situations may not fully realise they are being exploited, or they are afraid they are doing something bad, or they fear consequences of telling, as pointed out, for instance, by the NGO representatives.

Pihlaja notes that it is important for professionals who encounter children or young people to respond to the needs of the child or young person while identifying vulnerabilities and concerning situations. As a matter of priority, she suggests that it is not necessary to know whether the concerning situation is precisely human trafficking but rather to identify potential indicators of exploitation, trafficking and abuse and to intervene in the situation so that its continuation is not made possible.¹⁰⁶

Investigations

According to interviewed law enforcement experts, once a child has been identified as a potential victim of trafficking a comprehensive pre-trial investigation process is started. Children should always be interviewed by professionals who have received training in child interviews, which is very comprehensive.¹⁰⁷ Based on the Criminal Investigation Act (805/2011), interviews with children are recorded when the victim is under 15 years of age, or when the victim is 15–17 years old and subjected to trafficking or aggravated trafficking or sexual offences and does not want to be heard in person during trial. It is also possible to use a video recording in cases of human trafficking/aggravated human trafficking involving a victim aged 18 or older if being heard in person during the trial would endanger the victim's health or cause other comparable significant harm.¹⁰⁸ If a child has to testify in court, it can be done through video conferencing.¹⁰⁹

Interviewed expert working in the field of social and victim services pointed out that children with migrant background who are asylum seekers or refugees and who have been exploited e.g. sexually or in forced labour during their migratory journey however rarely want to file a criminal report. Even if they would like to do so, there is rarely enough detail for the police to initiate a pre-trial investigation.

We don't assume minors want to talk to the police. The child protective services know the main details. Those who have become victims abroad do not normally want to do so, unless they specifically want to file a criminal report, or unless we receive some kind of information that could actually lead to catching the perpetrator. – Expert Interview 4.

¹⁰⁵ Pihlaja 2024a, 58.

¹⁰⁶ Pihlaja 2024a, 58.

¹⁰⁷ Lehtinen & Rossi 2022, 75–76.

¹⁰⁸ See [Act amending the Criminal Investigation Act 453/2023](#)

¹⁰⁹ GRETA 2024, 29–30, 35.

According to a study by Pihlaja and Piipponen, cases of trafficking in children rarely come to the attention of the authorities in real time, and making a police report much later often means that gathering evidence is much more difficult.¹¹⁰ Beyond victim's story, also other evidence should be secured, such as messages from different communication apps and social media, photos, videos and so on. An interviewed members of the judiciary mentioned that the problem is that often perpetrators use messages that disappear after a few minutes, which make it more difficult to secure evidence of e.g. exploitation itself or means of control used.

Another challenge mentioned by several interviewed law enforcement officers and members of the judiciary is securing evidence of psychological control as it may be very difficult for the victim to discuss the issue, to and then for the police to secure evidence of such pattern of behaviour rather than a single incident of an assault or a threat. In cases involving minors, Pihlaja and Piipponen noted that the investigation has not always been opened under aggravated human trafficking, even if elements of trafficking have been apparent. Moreover, the victims being underaged has not had a significant effect on the length of the pre-trial investigation when compared to adult victims.¹¹¹

The interviewed law enforcement and members of the judiciary mainly agreed that children are treated well in the criminal justice process if it is a case of trafficking or sexual offences. In such cases their needs are carefully considered in different stages of the criminal justice process, including getting a support person and a skilled lawyer. NGO representatives and experts working in the field of social and victim services were more critical. In particular, the lack of information how the case is proceeding may be stressful for the victims:

One area where I often hear negative feedback is communication about the stages of the process: where things currently stand, whether there will be further questioning. While this isn't the case for all young people, for many of them and their families there's a lot of uncertainty about how long the process will take and what the different stages are. Of course, in some cases it's not even possible to provide precise information. But when it comes to questionings, based on what young people share, they are often very distressing experiences. I can't say for sure whether more preparation would be needed, but it seems that these situations, perhaps understandably, don't leave much room for the young person's emotions. – Expert interview 11.

Based on the Finnish Criminal Investigation Act (805/2011) the pre-trial investigator must determine whether the injured party is in need of special protection measures and based on instruction by the Prosecutor General's Office and National Police Board, the investigator must consult the prosecutor on the issue in cases that involve sexual and human trafficking crimes, violence in close relationships, and crimes against children.¹¹² Unlike in many other European countries, however, the police works as the investigation leader, though prosecutor must be consulted in cases involving human trafficking.

The human trafficking legislation was generally seen by interviewees as sufficient. Some interviewees saw the sentencing range quite lenient, also in comparison to sexual offences. As one law enforcement officer said:

¹¹⁰ Pihlaja & Piipponen 2023, 69–70.

¹¹¹ Pihlaja & Piipponen 2023, 69–70.

¹¹² Simanainen 2016, 33–34.

This way we measure punishment. The regulation concerning sentencing doesn't necessarily encourage the police to, instead of just dealing with one or five or ten sexual offences, also include human trafficking, which should be investigated in a completely different way and over a longer period of time. It comes across as more laborious, and the "reward" – in heavy quotation marks – that the police would get from it, or the punishment for the perpetrator, feels quite small. [...] Especially when we're talking about sexual violence offences, the sentences for crimes against children are often quite substantial, with fixed prison terms. So, there's a tendency to settle for that, because it's relatively easy to secure. And this has been discussed in research for probably 15 years now, that it's just so much easier to investigate something other than human trafficking. – Expert interview 12.

A joint model for the pre-trial investigation of human trafficking offenses ("Ihmemalli") was created by the Police University College in 2023 with the aim of clarifying and harmonizing police measures related to trafficking investigations across Finland.¹¹³ The modeling took into account children as a particular target group of exploitation. The handbook developed as part of the project provides concrete tools for different actors in dealing with human trafficking and related phenomenon.¹¹⁴ According to the handbook in investigations of child trafficking, it is essential to ensure that from the very beginning of the pre-trial investigation, the child has access to a legal counsel specialised in trafficking cases, as well as an adult/support person whom the child perceives as safe. This was confirmed by the interviewed experts and focus group comprised of law enforcement officers and members of the judiciary as a key issue in safeguarding victim's rights. NGOs pointed out that there may be challenges in finding such legal counsel.

The support person should be allowed to be present in the same room during interviews and interrogations and be present when the child is informed of their rights and responsibilities, as well as when questions regarding charges and penalties are asked. During the interview, it is important to investigate, for example, whether the perpetrator was aware of any vulnerabilities the child may have had—such as mental health issues or difficult home circumstances—who the child spoke with about, for instance, selling sex or drugs and their need for money before the situation arose, how the decision to act came about, what would have happened if the child had not acted as they did, and how the child would describe their relationship with the other individuals involved in the case.¹¹⁵

In cases of human trafficking, it is also important to assess the victim's need for protection in writing. The assessment is carried out with the victim if they are aged 15 or approaching the age of 15, and for younger children, it is done with their guardians. The assessment must be conducted before the interview, at least to the extent that the interviewee is informed of their right to request that the recorded interview be used in the main hearing instead of personal testimony. Even if a young victim states that they wish to be heard in person during the main

¹¹³ <https://polamk.fi/en/ihmemalli-en>; HEUNI was a project partner and wrote a report on NGOs views of trafficking investigations.

¹¹⁴ Willman-Koistinen et al. (Eds.) 2024.

¹¹⁵ Pihlaja 2024b, 311.

hearing, it is highly recommended to record the interview, as they may later change their mind.

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The interviewed members of the judiciary mentioned that using videoed interviews makes the criminal justice process less stressful for victims. However, if the victim turns 18 before the case goes to trial or proceeds to court of appeal, they may have to testify in court in person. There is however an update in court procedures taking place starting from 2026, in which testimonies given in district court will be videoed and if the cases appealed, the videoed testimony is used by the court of appeal to make their decision.¹¹⁷ This may help relieve the burden of the criminal justice process for the victims.

Convictions

Valovirta and Kainulainen (2024) analysed 35 human trafficking convictions concerning children given by the district courts and courts of appeal in 2012–2024 for the Finnish national trafficking rapporteur. In most of the cases the children had been subjected to sexual exploitation. Some charges were also brought for forced labour or subjecting a child to circumstances contrary to human dignity. Slightly over a half of the cases led to a guilty conviction (either on trafficking charges or on secondary charges such as pandering or aggravated assault), mostly in cases involving sexual exploitation. No charges of forced labour succeeded in court. Overall, the dismissal rate of charges was 46 percent which is high for offences under the Criminal Code. The authors found it surprising that the dismissal rate was so high, given that the definitional elements of human trafficking crimes are more easily applied to children than adults.¹¹⁸

Interviewed experts noted that based on their experiences, cases of prolonged sexual exploitation or cases involving commercialized sexual exploitation have the highest success rate in court. Cases where a single incident of sexual exploitation has occurred are more challenging and the interviewed law enforcement and criminal justice experts mentioned that it may be easier to use other crime labels in such cases with the same result. This concerns e.g. cases where a run-away child has been picked up by an adult that provides them shelter and then rapes the child.

In line with the study by Valovirta and Kainulainen, the interviewed experts also discussed that forced labour in particular is considered difficult to prove in court when it comes to children. Furthermore, situations of placing a child into circumstances contrary to human dignity are challenging in light of the case law, because the court has problems in defining what that means in practice.

Koivukari, Korkka-Knuts, Mahmood and Melander (2022) analysed case law from human trafficking cases between 2010 and 2020. This included a handful of court judgements involving victims that were underaged either during the entire act of trafficking or who had been underaged when it started. The authors concluded that in the latter type of cases, where the victim had turned 18 while being subjected to trafficking, the vulnerable position of a child had

¹¹⁶ Asmudela 2024, 315.

¹¹⁷ Hautamäki / Advokaatti 2025.

¹¹⁸ Valovirta & Kainulainen 2024, 61.

not been considered. Furthermore, the victims being underaged was not taken into account when determining the level of seriousness of the crime.¹¹⁹

Interviewed experts discussed that problems in case law and different interpretations may indicate that judges lack training on human trafficking and its features, given that the definition of trafficking is so complex. Therefore, charges of more traditional sexual offences may be a better route to secure conviction. Moreover, as pointed out by interviewed member of the judiciary, there is also a lack of specialization among judges.

Judges have certainly had less training on human trafficking than, for example, prosecutors. And of course, cases can often end up with anyone – someone who may not be specialized in the topic at all. – Expert interview 3.

Interviewed members of the judiciary stressed that they have to rely on the available evidence brought up in court, as well as the offence label used by the prosecutor to carefully evaluate each element of the crime. The judges cannot evaluate whether there are elements of trafficking in a case if the prosecutor is not charging for trafficking.

In principle, we are bound by the charges: if the prosecutor only brings charges for rape or sexual abuse, then of course we don't even have the opportunity to formally consider whether there might be elements indicative of human trafficking. But if such a charge is brought, then that aspect is naturally examined thoroughly. – Expert interview 14.

Interviewed members of the judiciary also saw the 2023 legislative change which requires that sexual or crimes against life, health, freedom, privacy, peace or honor of children, including human trafficking must be processed urgently and the court has to begin the main hearing within 30 days of the initiation of the case by the prosecutor as a very good thing in terms of the interests of the child.

These cases of young victims are aimed to be taken into processing quickly, so that is in itself a good reform, because otherwise it is shockingly slow process at the moment. So it is quite positive. Yes, in my opinion it has been good change. – Expert interview 13.

None of the interviewed law enforcement or members of the judiciary had direct experience with cases of trafficking for forced criminality proceeding to court. However, it was mentioned as a particular challenging field where potentially cases could be identified. One member of the judiciary, for instance, mentioned the phenomenon of recruiting children under the age of 15 to take part in, e.g., robberies in order to avoid criminal liability, but had not come across such a case involving a trafficking charge.

Hannonen and Kainulainen (2022) researched the principle of non-punishment of victims of human trafficking, i.e., that victims of trafficking who have been compelled to commit offenses on behalf of the exploiter should not be punished for such offenses. There are still obstacles in the application of the principle due to the lack of experience in applying it, the inadequate identification of victims of trafficking, and the insufficient attention to the exploitation behind the offense.¹²⁰ In Finland, the age limit for criminal liability is 15 (CC 3:4.1), so the non-punishment

¹¹⁹ Koivukari et. al. 2022, 166–170.

¹²⁰ Hannonen & Kainulainen 2022, 170.

principle needs to be considered for 15–17-year-old children. It has been argued that for the non-punishment principle to apply, it should be sufficient that the criminal offence committed by the child is connected to a trafficking situation.¹²¹ Further research on exploitation in criminal activities is needed, particularly as a form of human trafficking involving child victims.¹²²

The issue of non-punishment was also brought up in the focus group discussions. The participants highlighted the challenges in seeing suspects of crime as victims, or getting to the truth of the matter. In worst case scenarios this may result in situations where the exploitation behind a criminal activity is not identified and the person is sent to prison instead, as outlined by one focus group participant:

A huge part of prisoners are both perpetrators and victims. Sometimes it feels like the role of the perpetrator is emphasized, by the authorities we work with and even by ourselves, and of course, one of our tasks in society is to intervene and prevent recidivism. But this emphasis can overshadow everything that the person has experienced as part of the criminal subculture. [...] Much less is said about how people are lured or forced into crime, or how children are growing up in families, in native Finnish families, and in families of adult prisoners, who are already involved in criminal activities. These children, through their parents, may become involved in crime already as minors. Is that coercion, enticement, or something else? Is it intergenerationality? – Participant in the focus group for authorities.

5.2. Victim support

As a rule, a suspicion that a child is a victim of violence, exploitation or trafficking triggers two investigation processes: the criminal process and the child protection process. The police and the prosecution system are responsible for the criminal investigation, and the social welfare department is responsible for child protection actions. This process focuses on finding out whether the child is safe and whether their development opportunities have also been secured.¹²³

Child victims of trafficking can receive specialised assistance via the National Assistance System for Victims of Trafficking, or if they have a municipality residence, via their regional well-being county, as was outlined previously. Also NGOs can provide assistance to children. However, they should refer the child to child welfare services, if they suspect the child is a victim of trafficking. If the child is aged 15–17, their own consent is required in order to make the referral to National Assistance system.¹²⁴

In accordance with Section 11 of the Social Welfare Act (1301/2014), social services must be arranged, i.a., to support the child's balanced development and well-being, and to respond to the need for support caused by domestic and family violence, as well as other forms of violence, exploitation, and maltreatment. These other forms of exploitation may include, for instance, human trafficking or similar exploitation. It may be of a sexual, economic, physical, or psychological nature, and may involve, for example, coercive control.¹²⁵

¹²¹ Hannonen & Kainulainen 2022, 82.

¹²² Ibid., 175.

¹²³ Mäkelä, Bildjuschkin, Laajasalo & Kettunen in Korpilahti et. al. 2020, 136.

¹²⁴ Lehtinen & Rossi 2022, 130.

¹²⁵ Sosiaali- ja terveysministeriö 2024, 49.

As stipulated in section 27 of the Child Welfare Act (417/2007), child welfare clientship begins when a social worker determines, based on a service needs assessment, that: 1) the child's growing conditions endanger or do not secure the child's health or development, or 2) the child, through their behavior, endangers their own health or development, and 3) the child needs services and support measures as referred to in the Child Welfare Act.

All children regardless of their status are entitled to health care services, including dental services, as well as social and child welfare services if they are deemed necessary. Children also have the duty to attend school until they turn 18.

The interviewed experts working in the field of social and victim services pointed out that work in supporting child victims must be based on assessment of their individual needs and circumstances. As pointed out by one interviewed NGO expert, normally the child's whole of sense of safety has been jeopardized and building of trust is an integral part of the support process.

Often, there's a strong underlying sense of insecurity, because there have been... well, there may have been several stays in shelters, depending on the situation. There are also unresolved custody and visitation issues. It depends on what kind of violence has occurred – whether it was directed at the child or whether the child merely witnessed it. Does the child even have a relationship with the father? So, the process starts with mapping out everything that's going on and building trust. I think restoring that sense of safety is really at the heart of it all. – Expert interview 9.

If a child has no guardian they are accommodated either to a group home or support housing (>16-year-olds) (Reception Act 746/2011, 17 §). Underaged asylum seekers without a guardian have the right to an (reception) allowance, and those potential victims of trafficking that are registered in a municipality in Finland may have the right to social assistance. According to the Aliens Act, the Immigration Services have the obligation to start tracing the parent or guardian of the potential child victim of trafficking.

Interviewed experts working in the field of social and victim services noted that in certain circumstances, children may be placed in institutional care which then can result in them ending up in situations of high risk rather than lowering risks. It may be difficult to restrict children's movement also in cases where it is suspected that they are involved in criminal activities or are subjected to abuse.

According to the Child Welfare Act (417/2007), restrictive measures can in certain situations be used on a child in institutional care, and restrictions on contact may be applied in other forms of substitute care, such as foster care. Restrictive measures listed in Chapter 11 of the Act include restriction of contact, confiscation of substances and objects, body search, physical examination, inspection of property, deliveries and premises, and withholding of deliveries, physical restraint, restriction of freedom of movement, return of a child who has left the institution without permission, isolation, and special care for a child aged 12 or older.

According to section 61a of the Child Welfare Act, restrictions may only be used if: 1) the restriction is in the best interests of the child and proportionate to the child's age and level of development, 2) the restriction is justified and appropriate for the implementation of the child's care and upbringing or the purpose of the decision that led to substitute care, 3) the use of the

restriction is necessary to prevent serious danger to the child's or others' health, to protect physical integrity, or to prevent significant property damage, 4) the restriction is proportionate to the interest being protected, 5) the child's opinion about the restriction has been ascertained in accordance with section 20, unless this is clearly impossible, and 6) other, less intrusive means are not suitable in the situation.

Furthermore, the restriction must be carried out safely and with respect for the child's human dignity, considering their individual situation, age, gender, and cultural and religious background. During the restriction, the child's individual needs and basic necessities must be met. The restriction must not include subjugation, punishment, or any other degrading treatment. The use of the restriction must be ended immediately once it is no longer necessary. A restriction must not be used as a punishment, nor should its use cause harm or damage to the child.

The Barnahus model was identified as a best practice by interviewed law enforcement experts. It is based on European quality standards, the purpose of which is to establish a common operational and organisational framework to prevent the re-traumatisation of the child, to ensure the rights of the child and to achieve a smooth and reliable criminal process. Work following the Barnahus model is conducted by police officers investigating crimes against children, prosecutors, and health care and social welfare professionals.¹²⁶ Children and young people and their families are assisted in the acute phase as well as in the long run, by for instance by offering mental health services and supporting them during a criminal process. The five university hospitals in Finland house Forensic Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Units (or Barnahus units), which provide executive assistance by performing examinations based on a request by the police, prosecutor or the court. The units also provide consultation, assistance and training to other authorities.¹²⁷ Having such coordination in planning and service provision was described as a best practice by the interviewed law enforcement officers in terms of ensuring a comprehensive approach and access to specialised support for child victims.

Interviewed experts and focus group participants emphasised that multiple actors are needed in the efforts to protect child victims of trafficking. The role of NGOs providing low threshold and anonymous support was deemed important in reaching to those children and young people who e.g. fear the consequences of disclosing their experiences and actions to authorities. This essential work is now in jeopardy because of budget cuts by the Finnish government, which raised concern among experts:

Now that these major cuts to organisations are coming, and even bigger ones are being discussed again... A civil society sector that can operate in these gaps – where people fall outside the scope of certain services – is really important. Services that are free and anonymous, where people can turn when official processes feel intimidating or frightening, are vital. That's why it's so important to safeguard the operating conditions of organisations. – Participant in a focus group for NGOs

Pihlaja and Piipponen (2023) note that to provide comprehensive assistance for victims of human trafficking, the reasons behind exploitation must be identified and addressed at first. According to the authors, effective support can be achieved through flexible, multi-sectoral

¹²⁶ <https://barnahus.fi/en/>

¹²⁷ <https://barnahus.fi/en/pre-trial-investigation-and-interviewing-the-child/>

cooperation, and comprehensive support services can contribute to the success of the criminal procedure.

Finally, victims of trafficking can claim compensation from the State Treasury under the Act on Compensation for Crime Damage (1204/2005) in relation to personal injury and suffering. To receive compensation, the victim must have reported the crime to the police. If the case was heard in court, the victim must have claimed compensation from the offender, however, the victim can claim state compensation even if the offender was, e.g. not found, or was not heard for some other reason.¹²⁸ In most cases, the maximum compensation for suffering is 4,300€, but in cases involving a sexual offense, the maximum is 11,400€, and in cases where the victim was a child at the time of the offense, 19,500€.¹²⁹ State compensation is secondary, so compensation received from the offender will decrease the amount of state compensation.

5.3. Prevention

Prevention of human trafficking generally requires actions at many levels and policy areas such as in education and awareness raising. It should also tackle multiple and interlinked factors that contribute or enable violence, abuse and exploitation, such as discrimination, social exclusion, poor social protection and lack of legal and safe migration channels. Most experts and focus group participants frequently emphasized the role of schools in prevention of child trafficking. The school staff are well-placed to identify potential risk factors and situations but may lack information on indicators of trafficking and the national referral mechanism.

According to report by Pihlaja (2024), it can be stated that before a child and a young person becomes a victim of human trafficking, they have likely already been subjected to also some other form of exploitation, violence or abuse. Consequently, the prevention of trafficking in human beings should be linked to the prevention of a wide range of other forms of abuse against children and youth. Exploitation of children and youth can be best prevented by investing in the prevention of adverse childhood experiences, strengthening protective factors as well as supporting families and children in a timely manner. Preventing these can also help to prevent crimes committed by children.¹³⁰

Thus, trafficking in children and youth must be prevented at multiple levels. First root causes must be addressed at a broader societal level: In most cases, a child or young person has experienced abuse and exploitation for a long time before the situation meets the definition of trafficking as a criminal offence. Trafficking is effectively prevented by preventing factors that put victims at risk of exploitation and investing in early intervention. In addition, strengthening the experience of inclusion and early support is also needed. Second, prevention is needed at the individual level, on a case-by-case basis. Relevant cases must be exposed and identified in a timely manner and must be effectively addressed in order to support victims and enforce their rights, prevent re-victimization and ensure criminal liability.¹³¹

Third, special attention should be paid to trafficking in children and youth and its forms in education and training related to human trafficking. The regular training should be obligatory

¹²⁸ GRETA. 2024, 21.

¹²⁹ State Treasury 2025.

¹³⁰ Pihlaja 2024a, 56.

¹³¹ Pihlaja 2024a, 57–58.

to professionals. Fourth, awareness raising activities should be targeted towards children and young people in an age-appropriate and competent manner from multiple perspectives. From the perspective of raising awareness among children and young people, it also seems useful that professionals encountering children and young people in their work, such as the staff and representatives of schools, youth work and child welfare institutions, have been trained to inform children about the topic in an age-appropriate and diverse manner and to intervene in concerning situations.¹³²

Non-Violent Childhood action plan (2020–2025) and the up-coming action plan for 2026–2033 focus on prevention of violence against children, including trafficking. The action plans highlight for example the role of child health clinic services and school healthcare services in Finland which encounter practically all children in Finland. These meetings are opportunities to address the impacts of violence and support non-violence, as well as identifying potential signs of violence and conditions that may increase the risk of violence. The action plan emphasizes that overall, the most important way to reduce violence against children is to train practitioners and professionals to identify potential violence and take action in situations where a child or young person is suspected of having been subjected to violence or having witnessed violence.¹³³

Professionals can also support protective factors and identify risk factors, for example: in guidance provided to parents by child health clinics and by means of safety skills and sexual education in early childhood education and care and in schools.¹³⁴ Several interviewed experts noted that sexual health education and safety skills are key components in ensuring that fewer children and young people would end up in exploitative situations.

In principle, sexual education is provided in all schools in Finland, but the thing is that it's not standardized, it's not clearly defined in the curriculum. Teachers also don't get much training in this area, so ensuring the quality of sexual education across the country is really important. [...] It's crucial that people learn about the culture of consent and what it actually means, so that young people can protect themselves, but also from a positive approach: knowing one's own body and experiencing pleasure. It's all connected to having a healthy attitude toward sexuality and sexual health. – Participant in a focus group for NGOs

Valovirta and Kainulainen highlight that children must be given special consideration in anti-trafficking action plans and measures. Comprehensive measures must be used to address the phenomenon, and multidisciplinary cooperation should be increased. Action against violence against children must better consider human trafficking and other forms of exploitation. Additionally, measures to prevent re-victimization must be strengthened.¹³⁵ Professionals working with children need more training on child exploitation and trafficking as well as on the various forms of human trafficking, particularly the gendered nature of exploitation and violence, as well as the complexity of the phenomenon.¹³⁶

¹³² Pihlaja 2024a, 59.

¹³³ Korpilahti et al. (Eds.) 2020.

¹³⁴ <https://thl.fi/en/research-and-development/research-and-projects/non-violent-childhoods-action-plan/multidisciplinary-cooperation-and-information-flow> (Accessed 23 May 2025)

¹³⁵ Valovirta & Kainulainen, 64.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 68–69.

6. International cooperation mechanisms

According to interviewed experts, child trafficking cases are often cases of internal trafficking, where international cooperation is not needed. However, in cases concerning commercial sexual exploitation of children, there were some experiences of international cooperation. For example, interviewed criminal justice experts mentioned having good cooperation with Romanian authorities in cases involving Romanian victims and/or perpetrators. Cooperation facilitated by Europol was deemed to be mostly successful, although there had been some experiences of delays and problems in getting responses to requests. Cooperation with authorities from third countries was deemed more challenging also in terms of poor language skills and differences in approaching human trafficking investigations.

The Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) Task Force against Trafficking in Human Beings (TF-THB) has developed a Transnational Referral Mechanism (TRM) of the Baltic Sea Region, which includes the Nordic countries (Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Iceland, the Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania) and Germany, as well as Bulgaria, Romania and Ukraine with the aim of strengthening authorities' cooperation with counterparts in other countries in order to counteract trafficking and assist victims. A smooth transition between e.g., the assistance systems in the country of destination and in the country of origin can help lower the risk of revictimization.¹³⁷ The TRM includes four main components: 1. identification, 2. urgent assistance and protection, 3. long-term assistance and social inclusion, and 4. return.¹³⁸ The TRM website presents paths of assistance for different countries, however, victims of child trafficking are not addressed separately. The TRM was not mentioned by the interview experts or focus group participants and it is unclear whether it is still in place or updated in any way.

Finland is also part of the new Europol Operational Task Force (OTF) GRIMM which aims to “tackle the rising trend of violence-as-a-service and the recruitment of young perpetrators into serious and organised crime”. The taskforce is led by Sweden and brings together law enforcement from seven other European countries, including Finland.¹³⁹

7. Conclusion

Finland has established a comprehensive legislative and policy framework to combat trafficking in human beings, including child trafficking. However, challenges remain, particularly in the identification of child victims. For example, NGOs have reported a growing number of cases in which young adults seek support years after having been subjected to exploitation while they were still underage. Many of these young people were attending school and receiving various public services at the time the exploitation occurred, which highlights a challenge among professionals in these services to recognise the signs of abuse and the lack of trust and/or fear among children to disclose their experiences to various adults in their lives.

Although awareness of child trafficking and its associated risks has increased over the past five years, the number of identified child victims admitted to the National Assistance System for Victims of Trafficking remains low, and few cases result in convictions. Case law reveals inconsistencies in how courts interpret cases involving child victims and the constituent elements of trafficking. These discrepancies may stem from a lack of judicial specialisation and

¹³⁷ <https://bsr-trm.com/> (Accessed 9 May 2025)

¹³⁸ <https://bsr-trm.com/about-trm/> (Accessed 9 May 2025)

¹³⁹ Europol 2025.

limited understanding of the consequences of trauma or expertise regarding key trafficking elements, such as the act of taking control or establishing the purpose of exploitation. Aspects of psychological control are particularly difficult for the criminal justice system to grasp.

Expert interviews, focus group discussions, and previous research suggest that cases involving prolonged or commercialised sexual exploitation are most likely to result in trafficking convictions. There are also parallel sexual offences which may be easier for criminal justice actors to investigate, prosecute and convict of. In contrast, cases related to forced labour or conditions contrary to human dignity more often lead to acquittals because of lack of evidence or lack of understanding on what they would mean in practice. Exploitation linked to criminal activities and cyber-facilitated trafficking, in particular, continue to pose significant challenges for the criminal justice system.

A lack of trust in authorities and fear of consequences may prevent young people from disclosing their experiences to professionals such as child protection workers, school staff or the police. Therefore, multifaceted prevention efforts are needed to empower children and allow them to become more aware of their rights and of the nature of exploitation, especially in situations where it may be difficult to recognize potential manipulation or abuse. At the same time, it is essential to strengthen the capacity of professionals across sectors to identify signs of abuse and trafficking, and to refer children to appropriate services in line with the National Referral Mechanism.

Recommendations:

- It is important to strengthen the understanding within the criminal justice system of what constitutes child trafficking, what different forms of exploitation entail, and what are the consequences and manifestations of trauma. This should be integrated into the training provided to police officers, prosecutors and members of the judiciary. Judges would likely benefit from training involving law enforcement officers and prosecutors which would facilitate a better dialogue about the nature of the crime and the constituent elements of trafficking.
- It should be stressed among criminal justice actors, that according to the Criminal Code (ch. 25: 3§), if the victim is a child, the means of trafficking need not be proved. Furthermore, more attention should be paid in the criminal justice system to the inherent power imbalance in relations between an adult and a child (e.g., when evaluating whether the child had other alternatives or a possibility to detach themselves from the situation).
- Victims of human trafficking, including children and young people, should not be punished for crimes they were forced to commit as a result of being trafficked. It is important that police, prosecutors and judges receive training to better understand the non-punishment principle and apply it in practice.
- Awareness of child trafficking and its links to other forms of exploitation should be strengthened among professionals working with children and young people. They should also be informed on the National Referral Mechanism and procedures in place to guarantee rights for trafficked persons.



- Securing the funding of NGOs is essential to ensure low-threshold and anonymous services, outreach work, and hands-on support for victims.
- All regional well-being counties should ensure they have an assigned structure/unit/person which can be contacted and consulted in cases potentially involving human trafficking.
- Sexual education should be strengthened to ensure all young people understand what sexual exploitation and violence are, know their rights, and learn how to respect their own and others' boundaries and respond to risky situations. This should also include guidance on online safety, helping children recognise the risks of sharing personal images and communicating with strangers in digital environments.
- Better data collection efforts are needed to evaluate the policy responses to child trafficking. There is no information available on how many child victims of trafficking are assisted by well-being service counties if they have not been referred to National Assistance System.

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Annex: Case examples

<p>Case ID</p> <p><i>Full reference to the case, including a link if available.</i></p>	<p>Lapsivaimona Suomeen tuotu Nasrin Ebrahim uhmasi suvun tahtoa ja paljasti kaiken poliisille Kotimaa Yle (article from 11 May 2025)</p> <p>Irakilaismiehelle vuosien vankeusrangaistus muun muassa lapsiavioliitosta Kotimaa Yle (article from 9 May 2025)</p> <p>Mies pakotti alaikäisen tytön seksiin ja kaappasi kolme yhteistä lasta Irakiin – syyttäjä vaatii ehdotonta vankeutta Varsinais-Suomi Yle (article from 22 Feb 2025)</p>
<p>Country</p> <p><i>Name of the country where the case occurred or was identified.</i></p>	<p>The case had connections to Greece, Finland and Iraq. It was identified in Finland.</p>
<p>Source of information</p> <p><i>Court decision, official report, NGO case file, media article, interview respondent (generalised to preserve confidentiality).</i></p>	<p>The sources of information consist of media articles regarding a court decision by the Varsinais-Suomi District Court.</p>
<p>Date of case (or period)</p> <p><i>Month/Year or date range if exact date is unknown.</i></p>	<p>The human trafficking and exploitation took place from 2008 to approximately 2018. The abduction of the children occurred in 2018, and the legal proceedings lasted from 2018 to 2025.</p>
<p>Victim profile</p> <p><i>Age at time of trafficking, gender, nationality, vulnerability factors (e.g., poverty, family breakdown, prior abuse, migration status).</i></p>	<p>The victim was an Iraqi female, she was forced to marry when she was 13 years old. Vulnerability factors were her young age, migration status, family pressure and family ties to the exploiter.</p>
<p>Type of exploitation</p> <p><i>Sexual exploitation, labour exploitation, forced begging, forced criminality, domestic servitude, illegal adoption / sale of babies, removal of organs, other.</i></p>	<p>Forced marriage (sexual exploitation, domestic violence)</p>
<p>Recruitment and control methods</p> <p><i>Means of recruitment (e.g., deception, coercion, abduction, online grooming),</i></p>	<p>The perpetrator married the 13-year-old through coercion. The exploiter and the victim were relatives. Control methods included threats, violence and silencing the victim. According to the prosecutor, the accused took complete control over the victim, subjecting her to degrading conditions by exploiting</p>

<p><i>recruiter relationship to victim (if known) (e.g., family, acquaintance, organised group), control methods used (e.g., threats, debt bondage, confiscation of documents, violence, isolation).</i></p>	<p>her vulnerable situation as a minor without money and language proficiency, first abroad and later in Finland.</p>
<p>Trafficking route <i>Country of origin, transit countries, country of destination, internal trafficking</i></p>	<p>The forced marriage initially occurred in Greece, from where the man brought the victim to Finland using forged documents and a false story.</p>
<p>Identification and assistance <i>How was the victim identified? (e.g., law enforcement operation, referral by NGO, self-report), was the victim formally recognised as a trafficking victim, type of support provided (e.g., shelter, legal aid, psychosocial support, family reunification), was the child referred through the National Referral Mechanism (NRM).</i></p>	<p>The victim was identified through self-reporting. The victim eventually filed for divorce. In 2018, after the divorce, the man abducted their children to Iraq. Having lost her children, victim called the police and decided to tell the authorities everything else as well: about the forced marriage as a minor and the violence and exploitation she had been subjected to.</p>
<p>Investigation and outcome <i>Was the case investigated, number of suspects identified (if any), prosecution and outcome (if known) (e.g., conviction, pending, dismissed), barriers to justice or protection (e.g., fear of retaliation, lack of evidence, delays).</i></p>	<p>Authorities had issued a European arrest warrant for the suspect. In August 2024, he was arrested at the Greek border and was taken into custody in September.</p> <p>The prosecutor demanded more than two years of unconditional imprisonment for the Iraqi man for aggravated human trafficking, rape, child abduction, and aggravated deprivation of liberty.</p> <p>Southwest Finland District Court sentenced the Iraqi man to six and a half years in prison, among other things, for forcing a child into marriage. The court found the man guilty of aggravated human trafficking, child abduction and aggravated deprivation of liberty. The verdict is not final.</p> <p>However, the legal proceedings lasted as long as seven years. During this time, victim travelled to Iraq and Greece several times in order to get her children back. The most difficult part was to obtain evidence from abroad from the period before she arrived in Finland.</p>
<p>General observations</p>	<p>Victim's forced marriage at 13 to an older male relative, with her parents' approval and encouragement, highlights the</p>

<p><i>Summary of key insights, challenges, or promising practices from this case that could inform policy or capacity building</i></p>	<p>complex dynamics where family members can be complicit in trafficking, which complicates detection and intervention efforts.</p> <p>Furthermore, the case points to challenges in early identification of victims of forced marriage, as she was identified through self-reporting around 10 years after the trafficking and exploitation began.</p> <p>Nevertheless, the case is exceptional, as most similar cases never proceed to court. According to her legal representative, cases of forced marriage that come to the attention of authorities are only the tip of the iceberg.</p> <p>Interestingly the case shows that human trafficking and other crimes are often interconnected, as in this case concerning the abduction of the children. The legal proceedings lasted seven years in total, and she was only reunited with her children in the autumn of 2024.</p>
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<p>Case ID <i>Full reference to the case, including a link if available.</i></p>	<p>Teinityttö pyöritti julmaa seksibisnestä Rovaniemellä: myi kahta alaikäistä kaveriaan aikuisille miehille Lappi Yle (article from 4 Jun 2025)</p> <p>Teinityttö myi alaikäisiä kavereitaan aikuisille miehille – asiantuntija kertoo, miksi pitää tapausta poikkeuksellisena Lappi Yle (article from 5 Jun 2025)</p>
<p>Country <i>Name of the country where the case occurred or was identified.</i></p>	<p>Finland</p>
<p>Source of information <i>Court decision, official report, NGO case file, media article, interview respondent (generalised to preserve confidentiality).</i></p>	<p>The sources of information consist of media articles regarding a court decision by the Lapland District Court.</p>
<p>Date of case (or period) <i>Month/Year or date range if exact date is unknown.</i></p>	<p>The exploitation took place in the summer of 2016.</p>
<p>Victim profile <i>Age at time of trafficking, gender, nationality, vulnerability factors (e.g., poverty, family breakdown, prior abuse, migration status).</i></p>	<p>Victims were Finnish nationals, girls of 15 and 16 years of age during the time of exploitation.</p>

<p>Type of exploitation</p> <p><i>Sexual exploitation, labour exploitation, forced begging, forced criminality, domestic servitude, illegal adoption / sale of babies, removal of organs, other.</i></p>	<p>Sexual exploitation in the form of forced prostitution.</p>
<p>Recruitment and control methods</p> <p><i>Means of recruitment (e.g., deception, coercion, abduction, online grooming), recruiter relationship to victim (if known) (e.g., family, acquaintance, organised group), control methods used (e.g., threats, debt bondage, confiscation of documents, violence, isolation).</i></p>	<p>The 17-year-old perpetrator was an older friend of the victims. They watched a movie together about girls selling sexual services and the older girl recruited the other two to provide sexual services in exchange for money. The perpetrator pressured the girls to sell themselves. In the case of the younger one, she appealed, for example, to the fact that the girl could get money and get rid of her virginity.</p> <p>The younger victim – whose virginity was sold – had sexual intercourse with a total of six different men over at least four days, the older victim with eight men. The perpetrator pressured them to go to arranged meetings and obtain money, of which she took 20 percent for herself.</p> <p>The perpetrator blackmailed the victims to continue by saying that she would tell outsiders about the sale of sex. The activity only ended when the victims redeemed themselves by giving the defendant approximately 350–400 euros.</p> <p>According to the prosecutor, the 15-year-old victim in particular did not understand what she was agreeing to due to her age and inexperience.</p>
<p>Trafficking route</p> <p><i>Country of origin, transit countries, country of destination, internal trafficking</i></p>	<p>Internal trafficking</p>
<p>Identification and assistance</p> <p><i>How was the victim identified? (e.g., law enforcement operation, referral by NGO, self-report), was the victim formally recognised as a trafficking victim, type of support provided (e.g., shelter, legal aid, psychosocial support, family reunification), was the child referred through the National Referral Mechanism (NRM).</i></p>	<p>The younger victim who lost her virginity filed a criminal report about the incident in 2020. According to the verdict, she previously did not dare to report what happened because she was afraid that she herself had committed crimes.</p> <p>There is no information what kind of support she received. Given that the case was investigated as human trafficking, she has very likely been referred to National Assistance System by the police (following instructions regarding investigation of human trafficking), and/or she may have received support from Victim Support Finland and/or via her Regional Well-Being County.</p>

<p>Investigation and outcome</p> <p><i>Was the case investigated, number of suspects identified (if any), prosecution and outcome (if known) (e.g., conviction, pending, dismissed), barriers to justice or protection (e.g., fear of retaliation, lack of evidence, delays).</i></p>	<p>The handling of the aggravated human trafficking case in the Lapland District Court only began in May 2025. In June 2025, the Lapland District Court sentenced a woman born in 1999 to one year and four months of suspended imprisonment for aggravated human trafficking and human trafficking committed as a young person. She must also pay compensation of €9,000 and €4,700 with interest to the injured parties.</p> <p>According to the court, the process from preliminary investigation to consideration of charges took too long. The state was ordered to compensate the girl with €3,500 for the delay in the trial.</p>
<p>General observations</p> <p><i>Summary of key insights, challenges, or promising practices from this case that could inform policy or capacity building</i></p>	<p>According to the court, victims have suffered years of depression, anxiety, trust issues, and sleep problems as a result of the incident. The abuse has led to medication and therapy.</p> <p>Two sex buyers were also convicted of aggravated child sexual abuse in connection with the events. The District Court sentenced the man, who was 46 years old at the time of the crime, to one year and ten months of suspended imprisonment and 70 hours of community service. He must also pay the victim 8,700 euros in compensation, including interest. The man was the victim's first client. He had been aware of the victim's sexual inexperience. According to the court, the man was indifferent to the fact that the victim had the appearance and appearance of a 15-year-old.</p> <p>The District Court also sentenced the man, who was 29 years old at the time of the crime, to one year and five months of suspended imprisonment and 50 hours of community service. He is also required to pay the victim a total of approximately €7,300 in compensation, including interest.</p> <p>Interviewed expert from Victim Support Finland commented that in human trafficking targeting children and young people, the perpetrator is often an acquaintance of the victim, but rarely a peer from the same group of friends.</p> <p>However, there is at least one prior case example from Finland, where also an underaged girl forced her friends to sell sexual services and was sentenced for aggravated human trafficking.</p> <p>The case demonstrated how difficult it is to disclose such experiences to authorities. A young person may remain silent about abuse for many reasons. One is fear: the victim may have been pressured, threatened with violence, or</p>

	<p>threatened to distribute offensive footage. Shame and guilt also prevent people from telling. In this case, the perpetrator threatened to tell everyone about selling sex if the girls no longer agreed to continue the activity.</p> <p>In some cases, children and young people do not even realize that they have been victims of serious abuse, especially if they have initially agreed to participate. In that case, it can be difficult to understand later that they have been a victim of a crime. The young victim is often already an adult when he or she begins to understand what has happened to him or her and dares to contact support services.</p>
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<p>Case ID <i>Full reference to the case, including a link if available.</i></p>	<p>Julkinen selosteR 24-74.pdf (public summary of a court judgement from 30 May 2024)</p> <p>Äidille tuomio omiin lapsiin kohdistuneesta ihmiskaupasta MTV Uutiset (article from 30 May 2024)</p> <p>Äiti tuomittiin lastensa ihmiskaupasta ja väkivallasta Etelä-Karjalassa HS.fi (article from 30 May 2024)</p> <p>Äiti löi, kuristi ja pakotti pieniä lapsiaan kotitöihin Lappeenrannassa – tuomio koveni tuntuvasti hovioikeudessa Etelä-Karjala Yle (article from 1 Jul 2025)</p> <p>Kohtuuttomiin kotitöihin pakottaneen äidin tuomio koveni hovioikeudessa: neljä vuotta ehdotonta vankeutta HS.fi (article from 1 Jul 2025)</p>
<p>Country <i>Name of the country where the case occurred or was identified.</i></p>	Finland
<p>Source of information <i>Court decision, official report, NGO case file, media article, interview respondent (generalised to preserve confidentiality).</i></p>	Public summary of the conviction by South Karelia District Court, media sources
<p>Date of case (or period) <i>Month/Year or date range if exact date is unknown.</i></p>	The crimes took place between 2015–2019 in Lappeenranta, Finland, human trafficking during a four-month period in the spring of 2019.
<p>Victim profile <i>Age at time of trafficking, gender, nationality, vulnerability factors (e.g.,</i></p>	Victims were three children exploited by their own mother. The main victim was 12 years old, there is no information regarding their gender.

<p><i>poverty, family breakdown, prior abuse, migration status).</i></p>	
<p>Type of exploitation <i>Sexual exploitation, labour exploitation, forced begging, forced criminality, domestic servitude, illegal adoption / sale of babies, removal of organs, other.</i></p>	<p>Domestic servitude (during 4-month period in the spring of 2019).</p>
<p>Recruitment and control methods <i>Means of recruitment (e.g., deception, coercion, abduction, online grooming), recruiter relationship to victim (if known) (e.g., family, acquaintance, organised group), control methods used (e.g., threats, debt bondage, confiscation of documents, violence, isolation).</i></p>	<p>According to the court, at the time of the incident, the woman forced her 12-year-old child to do housework that was unreasonable for their age and developmental level. According to the court, doing housework and taking care of their infant sibling was a prerequisite for the child to be fed, go to bed, or go to school. Due to the lack of food, the child's growth slowed down and they were absent from school for more than 200 hours in one spring semester.</p> <p>According to the court, the woman subjected the 12-year-old child to serious and prolonged violence and the child was forced to live under the constant threat of violence. The woman hit the child in the face and body, including the soles of the feet, and strangled and bit them.</p>
<p>Trafficking route <i>Country of origin, transit countries, country of destination, internal trafficking</i></p>	<p>Internal trafficking</p>
<p>Identification and assistance <i>How was the victim identified? (e.g., law enforcement operation, referral by NGO, self-report), was the victim formally recognised as a trafficking victim, type of support provided (e.g., shelter, legal aid, psychosocial support, family reunification), was the child referred through the National Referral Mechanism (NRM).</i></p>	<p>There is no information how the case was identified in the first place. However, according to the district court, three of the children were questioned several times during the preliminary investigation. During first hearings, none of them said anything about the violence, but only spoke positively about their mother. After the children had been in care for some time and contact with their mother had decreased, the children disclosed what they believed had really happened. According to the children, the mother had told them what they should tell, and the children had acted accordingly. According to the court, the situation had begun to bother the children, and about a year after the acts ended, they had together decided to tell the truth.</p>
<p>Investigation and outcome <i>Was the case investigated, number of suspects identified (if any), prosecution and</i></p>	<p>The case was investigated and proceeded to court. In May 2024 the District Court of South Karelia sentenced the woman, born in 1982, to one year and 11 months of suspended prison time and 120 hours of community service for human trafficking, aggravated assault, and two counts of</p>

<p><i>outcome (if known) (e.g., conviction, pending, dismissed), barriers to justice or protection (e.g., fear of retaliation, lack of evidence, delays).</i></p>	<p>assault. The case proceeded to Court of Appeal of Eastern Finland, which on 1 July 2025 upheld the decision of the district court and sentenced the woman to 4 years of unconditional imprisonment on the account of aggravated human trafficking.</p>
<p>General observations <i>Summary of key insights, challenges, or promising practices from this case that could inform policy or capacity building</i></p>	<p>The court sentenced the mother for human trafficking, rather than aggravated human trafficking, because the relative short period of domestic servitude (4 months) and because the labour itself was not deemed to be dangerous or inappropriate for the child. The court of appeal found that the case amounted to aggravated human trafficking and sentenced the mother to 4 years of imprisonment for aggravated human trafficking.</p>

<p>Case ID <i>Full reference to the case, including a link if available.</i></p>	<p>Poliisi on saanut valmiiksi epäillyn ihmiskaupparikoskokonaisuuden tutkinnan (15 Feb 2023) Syyttäjä: Nainen piti Suomeen houkuttelemiaan thaimaalaisia pakkotyössä helsinkiläisessä spa-yrityksessään, 11-vuotias lapsi pesi pyykkiä neljän euron tuntipalkalla Ilkka-Pohjalainen (article from 6 Mar 2023) Thaimaalaisnaisen syytteet ihmiskaupasta hylättiin – yli vuosi ehdollista muista rikoksista Kotimaa Yle (article from 30 May 2023)</p>
<p>Country <i>Name of the country where the case occurred or was identified.</i></p>	<p>Finland</p>
<p>Source of information <i>Court decision, official report, NGO case file, media article, interview respondent (generalised to preserve confidentiality).</i></p>	<p>Press release of the police Media sources on charges by the prosecutor and decision by the Helsinki District Court</p>
<p>Date of case (or period) <i>Month/Year or date range if exact date is unknown.</i></p>	<p>2022</p>
<p>Victim profile <i>Age at time of trafficking, gender, nationality, vulnerability factors (e.g.,</i></p>	<p>Victims were of Thai origin. There were 8 adults and 3 children as victims. Some were working in the country illegally as they came with a tourist visa. It is not known whether this concerned the child victims.</p>

<p><i>poverty, family breakdown, prior abuse, migration status).</i></p>	
<p>Type of exploitation <i>Sexual exploitation, labour exploitation, forced begging, forced criminality, domestic servitude, illegal adoption / sale of babies, removal of organs, other.</i></p>	<p>Labour exploitation</p>
<p>Recruitment and control methods <i>Means of recruitment (e.g., deception, coercion, abduction, online grooming), recruiter relationship to victim (if known) (e.g., family, acquaintance, organised group), control methods used (e.g., threats, debt bondage, confiscation of documents, violence, isolation).</i></p>	<p>The suspect – Thai massage entrepreneur – deceived two Thai individuals into entering Finland illegally on tourist visas and to work at her massage parlour. They were promised a monthly salary of €1,900, which they did not actually receive. One employee received a salary of a few hundred euros, and the suspect paid another approximately €1,500. Part of the salary came in cash in Finland and part was transferred to the victims' bank accounts in Finland. Other six adults were also exploited, and they were in debt to the suspect.</p> <p>The suspect also employed children aged 11–14 who washed the company's laundry at the suspect's home address. One child worked at the company's office in customer service. One 11-year-old child washed laundry for 4 euros an hour, which is considerably low wage. The children were only employed for a few weeks. There were no children working in the massage business</p> <p>Some of the workers lived in the employer's living room and later in an apartment rented by the employer, where they were only provided with mattresses on the floor. These victims are suspected of paying around €250 per month per person for their accommodation. The rent was deducted from their salaries. It is not know whether this concerned the child victims.</p>
<p>Trafficking route <i>Country of origin, transit countries, country of destination, internal trafficking</i></p>	<p>Thailand – Finland</p>
<p>Identification and assistance <i>How was the victim identified? (e.g., law enforcement operation, referral by NGO, self-report), was the victim formally recognised as a trafficking victim, type of</i></p>	<p>No information available.</p>

<p><i>support provided (e.g., shelter, legal aid, psychosocial support, family reunification), was the child referred through the National Referral Mechanism (NRM).</i></p>	
<p>Investigation and outcome</p> <p><i>Was the case investigated, number of suspects identified (if any), prosecution and outcome (if known) (e.g., conviction, pending, dismissed), barriers to justice or protection (e.g., fear of retaliation, lack of evidence, delays).</i></p>	<p>The Helsinki Police Department's regional labor-related human trafficking team investigated the case as human trafficking and related crimes.</p> <p>The Helsinki District Court dismissed the charges of human trafficking against a Thai woman who worked as a massage and beauty entrepreneur on Tuesday.</p> <p>According to the District Court, the acts did not involve forced labor or conditions that violated human dignity, as required by the criteria for human trafficking, even though the criteria for human trafficking were otherwise met. Instead, the district court found the woman guilty of, among other things, aggravated extortion, pension insurance premium fraud, work discrimination, and the use of unauthorized foreign labour.</p>
<p>General observations</p> <p><i>Summary of key insights, challenges, or promising practices from this case that could inform policy or capacity building</i></p>	<p>While labour trafficking is the most commonly identified form of trafficking in Finland, there have been child victims only in very few cases. The trafficking charges were dismissed in this case due to lack of evidence, however, there was enough evidence to convict the suspect on multiple other crimes.</p>

<p>Case ID</p> <p><i>Full reference to the case, including a link if available.</i></p>	<p>Miehen ihmiskauppasytteen Turussa hylättiin – pakkotyötä ei voitu näyttää toteen Edilex (article from 3 Mar 2025)</p>
<p>Country</p> <p><i>Name of the country where the case occurred or was identified.</i></p>	<p>Finland</p>
<p>Source of information</p> <p><i>Court decision, official report, NGO case file, media article, interview respondent (generalised to preserve confidentiality).</i></p>	<p>Article in Edilex, a legal information and news service, written based on decision R 21/5600 by the Varsinais-Suomi district court (open to appeal).</p>
<p>Date of case (or period)</p>	<p>The exploitation took place in 2011.</p>

<p><i>Month/Year or date range if exact date is unknown.</i></p>	
<p>Victim profile <i>Age at time of trafficking, gender, nationality, vulnerability factors (e.g., poverty, family breakdown, prior abuse, migration status).</i></p>	<p>The complainants B ja C had arrived in Finland in 2011 as undocumented migrants. They had lodged in an abandoned house in Turku and met the defendant, A, who had offered them work. B and C were 14 and 16 years old at the time but, according to A, had said they were 19 and 21. They were later joined by D, who was an adult.</p>
<p>Type of exploitation <i>Sexual exploitation, labour exploitation, forced begging, forced criminality, domestic servitude, illegal adoption / sale of babies, removal of organs, other.</i></p>	<p>Labour exploitation.</p>
<p>Recruitment and control methods <i>Means of recruitment (e.g., deception, coercion, abduction, online grooming), recruiter relationship to victim (if known) (e.g., family, acquaintance, organised group), control methods used (e.g., threats, debt bondage, confiscation of documents, violence, isolation).</i></p>	<p>Complainants B, C and D worked in a garage, where they were taught how to take apart cars. A had hired them illegally and promised to pay them €20 per day. The garage had no electricity, lighting or heating. The complainants thought that the work was dangerous, especially detaching exhaust pipes without a proper lift. The complainants had to scrounge for food from grocery store dumpsters.</p> <p>According to A, complainants B and C had told him they were 19 and 21 years old, and wanted to learn how to dismantle cars and send the parts to be sold in their country of origin. They lived in an apartment provided by A for free – A stated that this was because it was part of his cultural heritage to help members of his community.</p>
<p>Trafficking route <i>Country of origin, transit countries, country of destination, internal trafficking</i></p>	<p>Country of origin was not mentioned. The alleged crime took place in Finland.</p>
<p>Identification and assistance <i>How was the victim identified? (e.g., law enforcement operation, referral by NGO, self-report), was the victim formally recognised as a trafficking victim, type of support provided (e.g., shelter, legal aid, psychosocial support, family reunification), was the child referred through</i></p>	<p>C and D robbed A, and they were sentenced for aggravated robbery. There is no information in the article about how the trafficking case came to be.</p>

<p><i>the National Referral Mechanism (NRM).</i></p>	
<p>Investigation and outcome</p> <p><i>Was the case investigated, number of suspects identified (if any), prosecution and outcome (if known) (e.g., conviction, pending, dismissed), barriers to justice or protection (e.g., fear of retaliation, lack of evidence, delays).</i></p>	<p>The district court had to assess the case based on an earlier Criminal Code provision on human trafficking, as the provision in force at the time of the offence included, as means, “seizing power over someone” (<i>ottaa valtaan</i> in Finnish). Since then, the wording of the provision has been replaced by “assuming authority over someone” (<i>ottaa määräysvaltaan</i>). Based on the preparatory works of the law, the threshold for “assuming authority over someone” is not as high as for “seizing power over someone”. “Pressuring someone” was added into the law as means of trafficking in the same amendment.</p> <p>According to the district court, B and C were in a vulnerable position to begin with, due the fact that they were young, undocumented migrants when arriving in Finland. Because they lived in A’s apartment, they were in dependent relationship with A, although the primary reason for dependence was their arrival in the country without a legal residency status.</p> <p>According to the district court, their vulnerable state and dependent status, as well as deceit were exploited in the recruitment of B and C. Based on the salary and inadequate work equipment it was clear that only someone in severe distress would have agreed to take upon the job – even though the exact circumstances of the work such as the length and number of working days were not uncovered during the proceedings. However, the district court saw that there may have been such justifiable misunderstandings related to the agreement on salaries that it could not be said that A had unequivocally deceived the complainants.</p> <p>The district court saw that based on the stricter provision in place at the time of the offense, “seizing power over someone” would have had to amount to a deprivation of physical liberty. However, B and C had a key to A’s apartment and were free to move about, so their physical liberty had not been restricted.</p> <p>A had insinuated about deportation and difficulties in settling in Finland, but there was no evidence of actual threats, apart from the threat of losing their housing. The court saw that A had tried to control B and C but it was possible that A truly believed in what he had told the complainants about authorities’ racism and other difficulties in Finland. The court held that references to deportation would have had to involve</p>

	<p>explicit threats about reporting the victims' unlawful residence in Finland to the authorities for it to constitute seizing power over the victims or forced labour. In addition, the court saw that the complainants had likely already known that they were under the risk of deportation.</p> <p>Had the description of the acts been fully proven, it would also have been possible to assess other degrading conditions on the basis of the victims' excessive workload and inadequate pay, which was also supported by the complainants' description of having to obtain food from grocery store waste containers. It was considered an inconsistency, however, that the complainants said they had to work long hours without breaks, yet the defendant had had a full-time day job elsewhere and could not have monitored the complainants closely enough to deny them lunch or other breaks.</p> <p>The district court noted that there were indications of forced labour but it was not sufficiently established that quitting work would have led to a penalty that would have met the elements of human trafficking.</p> <p>The district court concluded that it had not been shown that A's intent was to subject B and C to forced labour. Although they were forced to live in very difficult circumstances in Finland, the court held that this was due to their own decision to enter the country illegally and to remain outside of services such as reception centers, which A had nothing to do with. The court also took into account that C and D had robbed and seriously assaulted A, which, according to the verdict, would have been unlikely, had the complainants been as afraid of the defendant as they claimed.</p>
<p>General observations <i>Summary of key insights, challenges, or promising practices from this case that could inform policy or capacity building</i></p>	<p>The court considered that it was reasonably possible that B and C had told A that they were over 18. In human trafficking offenses involving minors it is not required to prove the element of means. In this case, however, the court assessed the use of means and concluded that the fulfilment of age-related intent was not relevant for establishing guilt.</p>