



NATIONAL ASSISTANCE SYSTEM FOR VICTIMS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

SEMIANNUAL REVIEW

1 January – 30 June 2019

Forced begging identified in Finland

The Assistance System investigates: human trafficking in the news

Statistics from first half of 2019 – a record number of new clients

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FOREWORD



Is there forced begging in Finland? This has been debated for more than a decade. In this form of human trafficking, persons in a subordinate position are forced to beg and hand over the funds they receive to their exploiters. Victims may also be coerced into committing minor offences.

This form of crime has been detected in the past decade in the other Nordic countries and, for instance, in Estonia. In Finland, however, it has to date not been identified.

This year two persons sought help from the Assistance System for Victims of Human Trafficking who had been forced to beg in Finland, as well as a third person that someone had attempted to coerce by violence into criminal activities in similar circumstances.

What does all this mean? Should all begging be suspected of involving human trafficking? Fortunately not. According to studies conducted by NGOs and by the police,¹ most begging appears to be exactly what it looks like: persons begging for money to alleviate their poverty.

The Assistance System concurs with this view. Nevertheless, we should note that the possibility of exploitation and human trafficking exists in nearly all fields, including begging. It is always possible that there are individuals who are being exploited among the many.

In spring 2019, the Assistance System organised fact-finding missions to Romania and Bulgaria (the countries from which the majority of migrant beggars come) and to Ukraine. These missions form part of the HOF-BSR project run by the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS). The purpose of the project is to boost co-operation between the countries in the Baltic Sea region in combating human trafficking.

Numerous victims of human trafficking who have come from Romania, Bulgaria and Ukraine have been identified in several coastal states round the

Baltic Sea. These three nationalities appear only at a low level in the statistics of Finland's Assistance System.

Record number of clients causes delays to application processing

In the first half of 2019, the Assistance System for Victims of Human Trafficking once again broke its record for the number of new potential victims of human trafficking referred. The total number of clients also increased, by more than 50% on the previous year.

The record number of clients and of applications (referrals) filed with the Assistance System have kept the Assistance System personnel busy. Although it has been possible to handle urgent cases quickly and efficiently, the processing times for non-urgent proposals have exceeded the target times. A new non-urgent proposal may take more than a month to process, depending on the case.

Research and training by the Assistance System

In March, the Assistance System and HEUNI published a report on human trafficking and exploitation of children and adolescents in Finland. According to the report, children and adolescents in Finland are exploited in a way consistent with human trafficking, for instance in criminal activities; yet they are not recognised as victims of human trafficking.

The Assistance System has sought to manage its share of the training of public authorities and other key groups, within its resources. Some 1,200 officials in the criminal investigation authorities received training on the identification of victims of human trafficking in the IHME project, which concluded in June 2019. Training was also provided on the criminal investigation of human trafficking offences. The training modules created in the project were incorporated as a permanent part of the training of criminal investigation authorities.

1. Lantela, Meri (18 Apr 2019) "The relationship of begging and crime has been debated for years: 'It is not enough to note that similar activities have been discovered in neighbouring countries'," YLE news. <https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-10716273>

The Assistance System investigates: THIS IS HOW HUMAN TRAFFICKING

IS PORTRAYED IN THE NEWS MEDIA

Many of us gain our understanding of human trafficking on the basis of what we see in the news media. It is therefore far from irrelevant how human trafficking is covered in the news. The Assistance System analysed news articles on human trafficking in Finnish print media in 2018 and discovered that male victims of trafficking remain invisible.

Women are victims, men are invisible

Among victims of human trafficking, women receive much more media attention than men or other genders. Coercion of victims into prostitution is a particularly popular topic, and news stories on this were sourced from foreign news sources too.

It was found that the gender of human trafficking victims is generally only specified in news stories when they are women. Male victims are referred to as victims or employees.

Men thus remain largely invisible, even in cases where the majority of victims are men, as for instance in the news stories on exploitation related to restaurants and berry picking.

This may reinforce the fallacy that human trafficking mainly comprises sexual exploitation of women. The vulnerability of men for becoming victims of human trafficking was not addressed in the news stories examined.

Foreign origin and immigration also tend to be emphasised in

news on human trafficking, often starting with the headline.

The Assistance System recommends that editors pay attention to how terms denoting gender and ethnicity are used in the news on human trafficking.

Criminal investigation processes prioritised

The majority of the news stories analysed were brief items reporting on individual criminal investigations, arrests or court hearings. In most cases, the story was based on a single official source, usually a press release issued by a court or a criminal investigation authority.

It has been estimated in international studies that presenting human trafficking through such isolated stories focusing on the criminal investigation process may cause the general public to have a very slanted view of the phenomenon: human trafficking comes across as a problem between evildoers and weak victims and, as such, something that needs to be addressed with criminal process responses.

Background factors underlying human trafficking are obscured in

such news stories. For instance, the dependency of a particular market on labour exploitation or structural factors contributing to victim vulnerability are not covered. This, in turn, makes it more difficult for news readers (who include public authorities) to identify victims of human trafficking and address the structural factors that facilitate human trafficking.

Articles providing background information often require the journalist to use more time and do more research, which may be incompatible with the rapid pace of reporting required for breaking crime stories.

Most disturbing cases selected from abroad

News stories from international sources increasingly focus on sexual abuse. In this category, the cases reported were often very shocking, concerning multiple victims and international criminal organisations. Almost without exception, the victims were women and underage children.

Indeed, international news stories formed a category of their own in

the study: the stories selected to be featured in the Finnish media were those that were particularly disturbing and, at the same time, served to reinforce stereotypes. Offences against infants and small children were frequently highlighted, and the stories were run with sensationalist headlines.

The study showed that it would be possible to select stories from international news sources that explore the background factors of human trafficking and less well known forms of human trafficking. Such stories could also help to provide context for brief news items on Finnish criminal cases. Whether these would be of interest to readers is another question.

Finnish media performed reasonably well

News reporting on human trafficking has been studied in several countries, such as the USA, the UK, Thailand, Poland and Canada. These studies have criticised the media for relying too much on official sources, for oversimplifying the phenomenon of human trafficking, and for employing sensationalist language. Also, international human trafficking is typically presented as sexual abuse perpetrated against women, and no background is provided for news stories on criminal investigations.

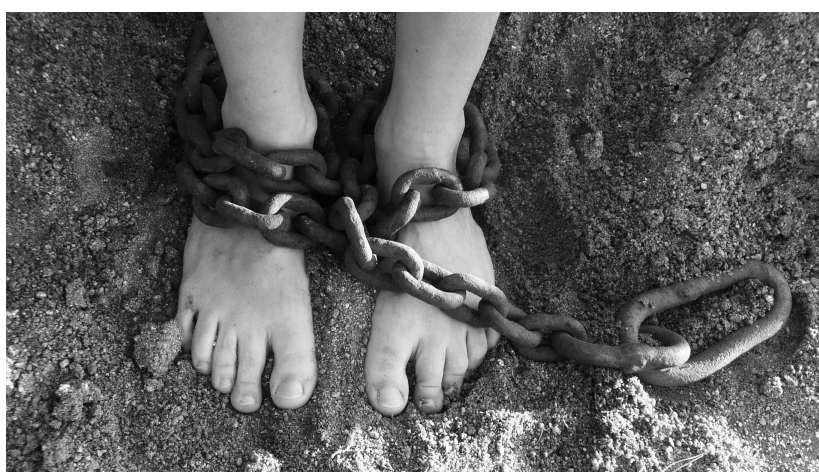
The study does show that Finnish media perform quite well in comparison in several areas. Except for news items about criminal investigation processes, journalists go to multiple sources to find information on human trafficking. In addition to official sources, journalists consult NGOs involved in combating human

trafficking, experts, and members of the business community.

The Finnish media generally report on human trafficking in a no-nonsense way, avoiding sensationalist language.

The illustrations selected are also appropriate for the most part, and images that reinforce stereotypes – such as women in chains or barcode tattoos – are extremely rare.

The material analysed, published in



Images like this that reinforce stereotypes give a biased impression of human trafficking. The Finnish media nowadays knows to avoid these.

2018, contained only a handful of articles representing investigative journalism or otherwise providing background on the phenomenon of human trafficking. These few stories were commendably thorough in shedding light on underlying factors. They included interviews with victims of human trafficking, travel to see the actual circumstances where the victims came from, and analysis of points in Finnish legislation that contribute to increased vulnerability for victims of human trafficking.

The report mentions that the year 2019 has seen publication of in-depth investigative stories on la-

bour exploitation, also giving a voice to male victims of human trafficking and exploitation.

Media study to be available in the autumn

The study comprised analysis of 91 stories on human trafficking in four Finnish news media sources (Helsingin Sanomat, Ilta-Sanomat, MTV Uutiset and Yle uutiset) and related images. The stories had been published on online platforms during 2018. Journalists familiar

with the topic were interviewed for the study.

The study, written up by **Terhi Tafari** LL.M., B.Soc.Sc., titled *Review of media framing of human trafficking in Finnish news media*, was financed by the anti-human-trafficking project HOF-BSR of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS). The report will be published by the CBSS in English, and will be available on the ihmiskauppa.fi website in the autumn.

For more on the collaboration between the Assistance System and the CBSS, see pages 16–18.

FORCED MARRIAGES AND FORCED BEGGING

This is another aspect of human trafficking in Finland. In the first half of 2019, a record 115 potential victims of human trafficking and 37 of their underage children were accepted as clients of the Assistance System. For the most part, the victims had been subjected to sexual and labour exploitation in Finland, but forced begging and coercion to undertake criminal activities were also identified. The number of forced marriages continues to increase. Those who had fallen victim to human trafficking abroad included those exploited for organ harvesting.



Forced begging is a form of human trafficking. Stock photo.

By the beginning of June 2019, the Assistance System had received over 50% more clients (115) than during the corresponding period in the previous year (76). The new clients were potential victims of human trafficking; 30% of them were estimated to have become victims of exploitation indicative of human trafficking in Finland.

The most common type of exploitation taking place in Finland was being exploited as a worker on a farm or in a restaurant (12 persons).

Forced marriages

An equal amount (12 persons) were victims of forced marriage related trafficking in Finland. In four of these cases, the victim had been forced to marry in Finland. In the remaining eight cases, the marriage had been contracted abroad, but exploitation had continued after the family's arrival in Finland.

In a study of forced marriages and their incidence in Finland, conducted in 2017,⁽¹⁾ it was estimated that the most common type of

forced marriage in Finland is one where a person resident in Finland, possibly even a Finnish citizen, is taken abroad by their parents to be married off. Not a single victim of this type of forced marriage has been referred as a client to the Assistance System.

Forced begging exists

Seven clients reported being a victim of human trafficking related to sexual exploitation in Finland. This is fewer than in the previous year,

when several persons coerced or pressured into prostitution were identified principally through the investigative efforts of the police.

New clients include persons coerced to undertake criminal activities or to beg. The persons who had been forced to beg (two cases) had also been intimidated into criminal activities and into collecting bottles for the purpose of financial gain for their exploiters.

There has been public debate for a decade now on whether there is human trafficking involving forced begging in Finland. Even though

(1) Toivonen, Virve: Pakkoavioliittojen ilmeneminen ja esiintulo Suomessa - Selvitysmuistio 2017 [Incidence and discovery of forced marriages in Finland]. University of Helsinki, Helsinki 2017, p. 11.

street begging is often exactly what it seems – begging for money for subsistence – there may also be exploited persons among the beggars.

Majority not asylum seekers

Only five of the victims who had been exploited in Finland were asylum seekers. Three other clients had previously applied for asylum but had become undocumented persons following an application rejection that had acquired legal force.

Most commonly, the victim was in Finland on the basis of family ties, by virtue of EU citizenship (incl. Finnish citizens), on a work-based residence permit, or completely illegally.

No investigations means no victims found

In 2018, several victims were identified and referred to assistance particularly through the efforts of the police to uncover crimes. This has not been the case in 2019. Police resources for uncovering crimes have been further reduced.

At the same time, referrals to the Assistance System by local authorities, child welfare authorities, prisons and health care services remain as rare as always.

There is concern in the Assistance System that victims of human trafficking in Finland continue to remain undiscovered. The Assistance System does not undertake investigative work itself; it needs potential victims to be referred to it. Victims may also seek assistance directly themselves.



Labour exploitation may occur on farms in or outside Finland. Stock photo.

Most were exploited abroad

The majority of new clients (nearly 70%) had been exploited outside Finland. The largest client group were victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation. Of these, 18 had been exploited outside the EU and 14 in an EU Member State. Those exploited within the EU had usually been coerced into prostitution. Those who were victims of human trafficking related to labour exploitation had in most cases been exploited outside the EU, usually in their home country or an adjacent country.

Fourteen clients had been forced into marriage in their home countries, but had since escaped their situation to another country.

Two victims of organ harvesting were identified. One kidney had been taken from each of them in

their home countries in carefully prepared surgery. The preparations had taken weeks, during which time the victims had been confined and often sedated into unconsciousness. After the operating wounds had been sutured, the victims had been set free on the street.

Four persons had been exploited as child soldiers. This had usually happened in the victim's home country, where a long-standing conflict was going on. Clients had been coerced into criminal activities both within and outside the EU.

No help before Finland

Of those who had fallen victim to human trafficking outside Finland, 96% had applied for asylum in Finland.

It is typical that persons falling

victim to human trafficking abroad had not received help in their predicament before arriving in Finland.

Reception centres most active

Clients have been referred to the Assistance System particularly by reception centres for asylum seekers, the Finnish Immigration Service, and lawyers and attorneys. Shelters for abused spouses, NGOs and the Police also show up in the statistics.

18 potential victims of human trafficking sought help from the Assistance System themselves or with the aid of another person.

Very few victims are identified by local authorities or for instance in health care services and prisons. In these areas, among others, there is an urgent need for training and guidance in the identification of victims of human trafficking and in referring victims to services.

Record-breaking number of clients

As of 30 June 2019, there were more clients in the Assistance System than ever before. In addition to the 458 adult clients, there were also their 129 underage children who are in Finland. The total number of persons receiving assistance at the end of June was 587.

The figure at the same time last year was 379, of which 80 were clients' underage children.

Statistics do not tell the whole story

The statistics for the first half of 2019 are given in diagrams in the following pages. The statistics provide information on persons referred to and admitted in the Assistance System.

Persons received into the Assistance System are potential victims of human trafficking. Some persons received as clients may turn out

not to be victims of human trafficking.

In some cases, it emerges that a person received as a client had lied about being a victim in order to benefit from the Assistance System.

Victims who did not want to seek help from the authorities may have received assistance from organisations providing help to victims of human trafficking. Such victims do not show up in the Assistance System's statistics.

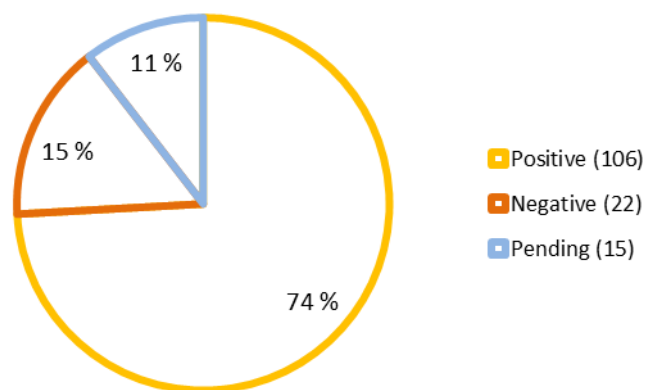
Finally, many victims never dare to, are not able to, or do not wish to leave their situation and seek help. Some, on the other hand, are never identified and do not receive information about the help available to them. Such persons do not, of course, appear in any statistics.

NEW CLIENTS - STATISTICS FROM 1 JAN – 30 JUN 2019

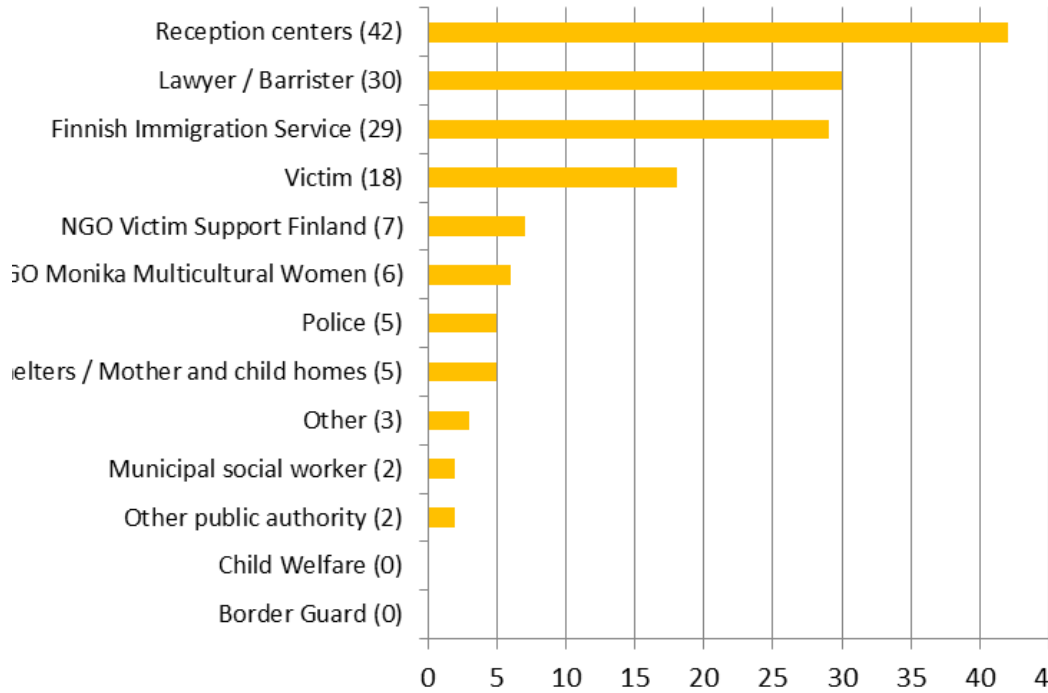
In the first half of 2019, 143 persons were referred to the Assistance System, and 106 of them were accepted as clients of the Assistance System. As at 30 June, 15 persons were still awaiting a decision on admittance.

12 persons were still awaiting decision in January 2019, who had been referred towards the end of 2018. Nine of these persons were admitted as clients, while three were rejected. These nine new clients are included in the statistics given below.

Decisions on referrals (143)

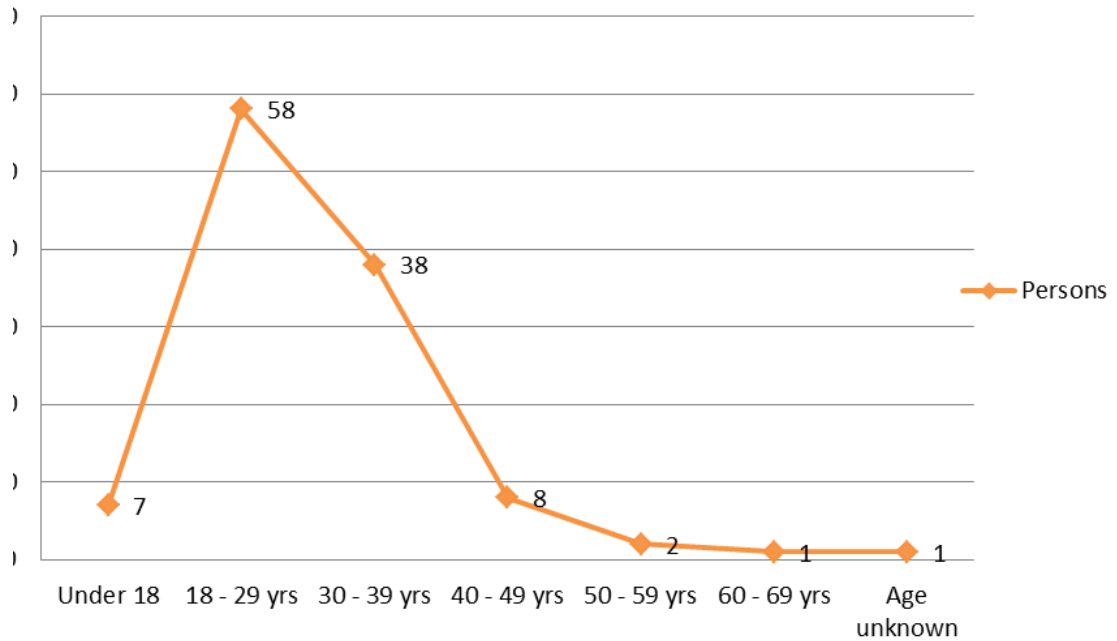


Parties who referred victims to the NAS 1 Jan - 30 June 2019 (143 referrals)

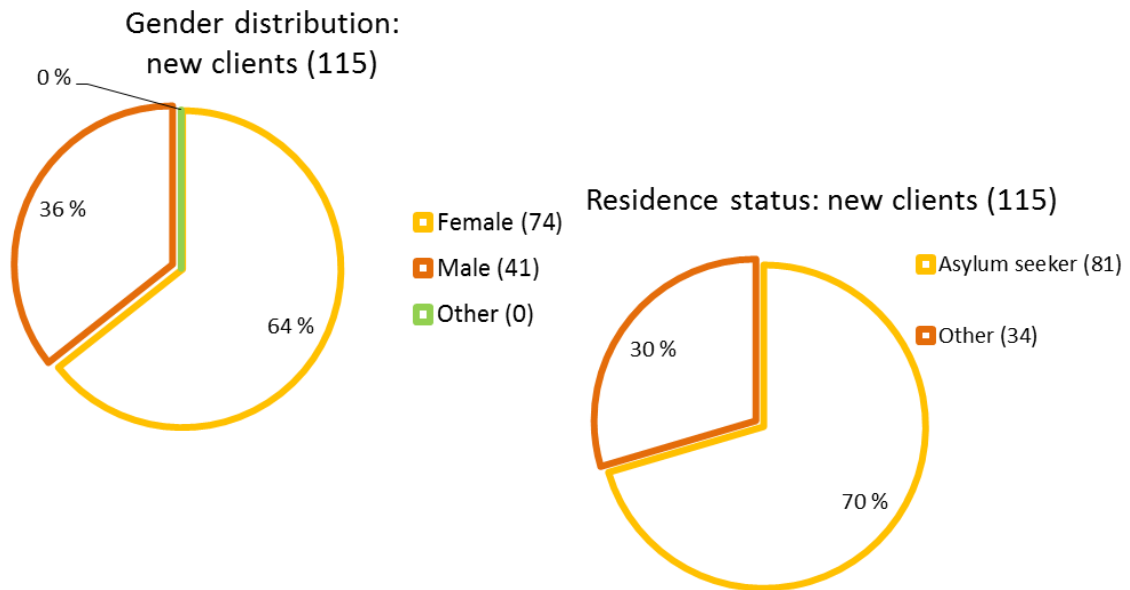


Local authorities and health care services still identify very few potential victims of human trafficking.

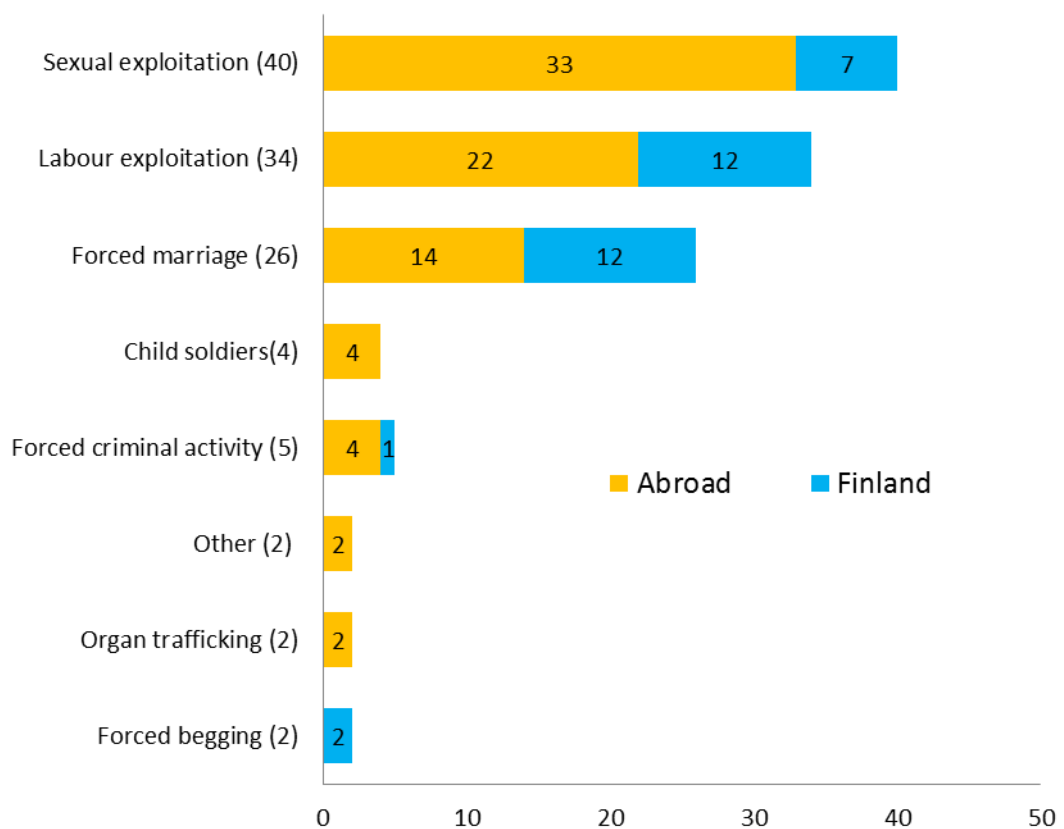
New clients (115) by age group



Most of the new clients are young adults. Eight are underage children, who are teenagers (aged 13 to 17).

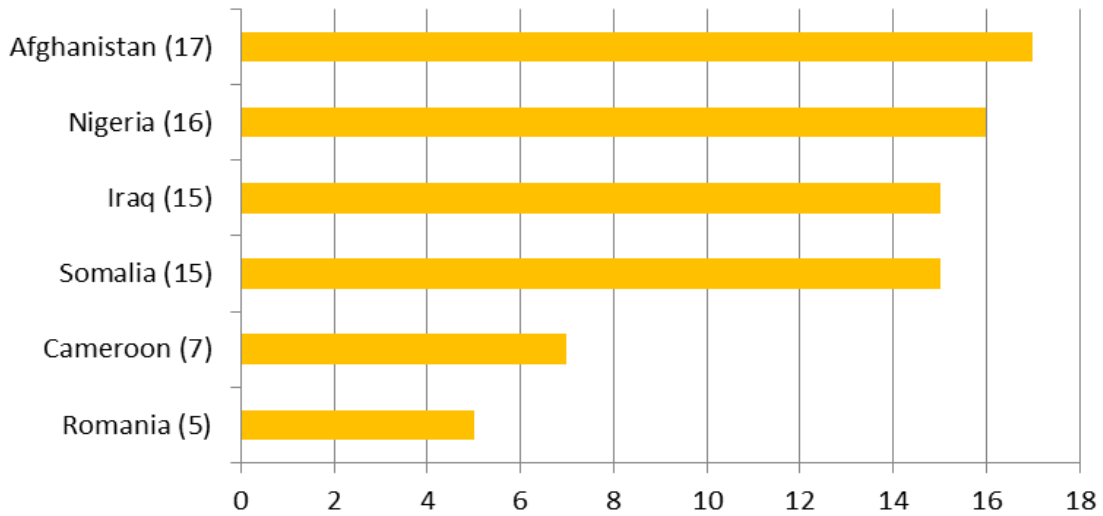


New clients (115) according to place and form of exploitation



Fewer victims have been identified in Finland this year than during the same period the previous year. This is due, among other things, to an absence of efforts to uncover crimes.

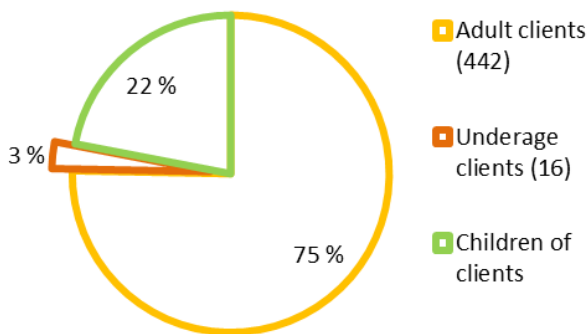
Top nationalities: new clients (115)



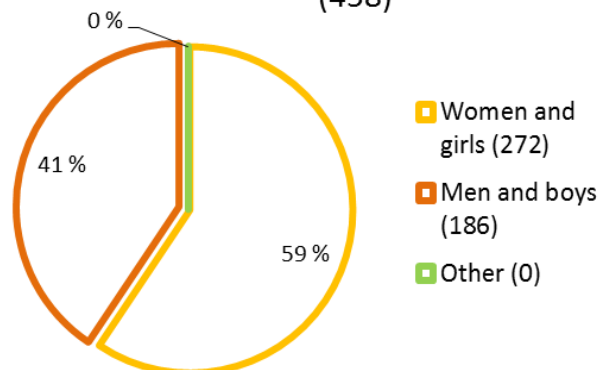
The new clients of the Assistance System represent 28 nationalities. The table lists the nationalities represented by five or more clients.

ALL CLIENTS OF THE ASSISTANCE SYSTEM ON 30 JUNE 2019

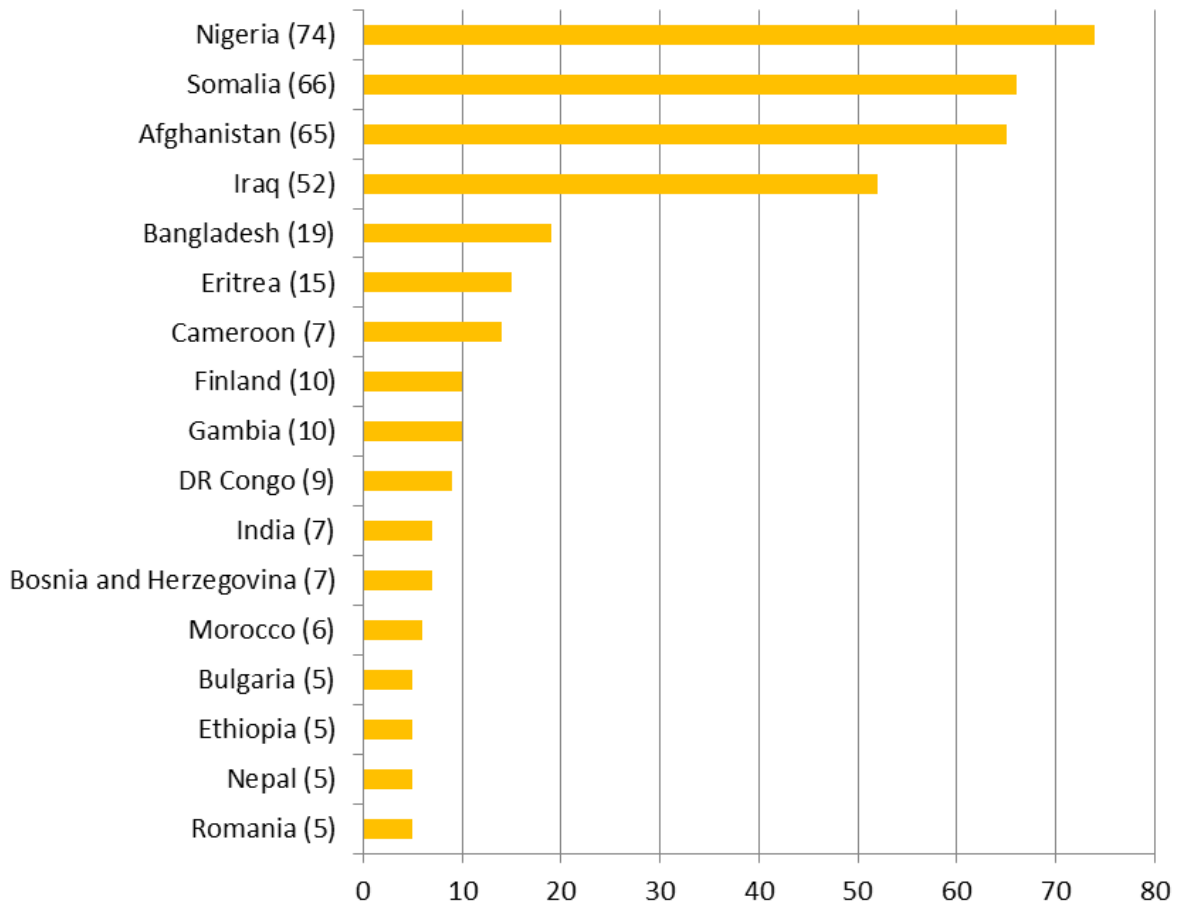
People within the scope of the NAS's services on 30 June 2019 (587 persons)



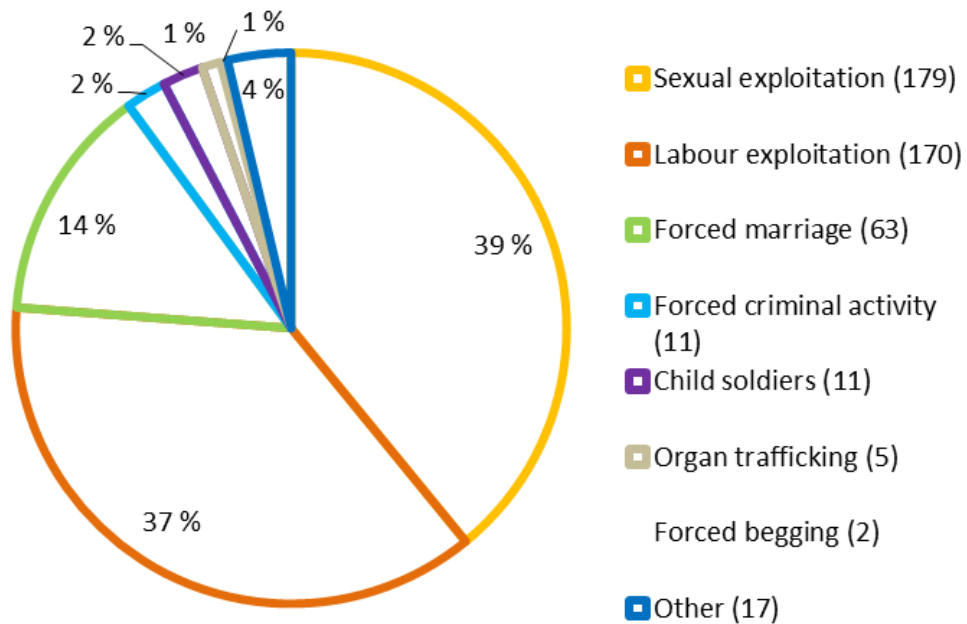
Gender distribution: all clients (458)



Top nationalities: all clients (458)



Form of exploitation: all clients (458)



FORMAL IDENTIFICATION BY THE ASSISTANCE SYSTEM

During the first half of 2019, the Assistance System for Victims of Human Trafficking evaluated 20 clients' cases with a view to formally identifying them as victims of human trafficking. The amount is slightly higher than during the same period the previous year.

Of these 20, 16 were identified and four were not: i.e. the latter were estimated not to have been victims of human trafficking.

Formal identification as a victim of human trafficking is evaluated in the Assistance System when the client may have become a victim abroad and the Finnish criminal investigation authorities have not been able to investigate the case.

Individuals who are accepted as clients of the Assistance System are initially classified as *potential* victims of human trafficking. Once in the system, clients can be officially identified as victims of human trafficking. Formal identification can be made by a criminal investigation authority, the Finnish Immigration Service, or the Assistance System.

Prior to making a decision on the official identification of a client as a victim of human trafficking, the



Assistance is provided to potential victims of human trafficking. It will later be evaluated whether the client actually was a victim of human trafficking or not. Stock photo.

Assistance System consults a multidisciplinary group of experts consisting of representatives of social services, child welfare services and health care services, the Police, National Bureau of Investigation, Border Guard, Finnish Immigration Service and Joutseno Reception Centre.

Officially identified victims of human trafficking may remain clients of the Assistance System until they no longer need assistance. Individuals who cannot be officially identified lose their eligibility for

Assistance System services.

Due to the limited resources of both the Assistance System and the group of experts, it has not been possible for the official identification process to keep pace with the number of clients. As a result, there were up to 57 clients in the Assistance System awaiting official identification as at 30 June 2019.

However, pending official identification, a client receives assistance from the Assistance System.

REFLECTION PERIODS GRANTED BY THE ASSISTANCE SYSTEM

During the first half of 2019, the Assistance System granted a reflection period to 12 of its clients. The duration of the reflection period varied from two to four months.

Reflection periods can be granted

to individuals who are residing in Finland illegally. The maximum length of a reflection period is six months, and the individual has a legal right to remain in Finland for that period of time.

A criminal investigation authority may also grant a reflection period to victims of human trafficking. Further information on the reflection period and formal identification is available at ihmiskauppa.fi.

IHME PROJECT ENDS AND EXCEEDS EXPECTATIONS

Hundreds of criminal investigation authorities received training through the IHME project. A comprehensive study of the situation with human trafficking in children and adolescents in Finland was also produced as one of the project's tasks. The project has now ended, having attained and exceeded its goals.

The IHME project, administered by the Assistance System for Victims of Human Trafficking, concluded on 31 May 2019. Lasting nearly two years and funded by the Internal Security Fund – Police (ISF–P) of the European Union, the project was intended to enhance competence in anti-trafficking in Finland, particularly for the criminal investigation authorities. During the last six months of the project, the focus was specifically on establishing a practice of training for the criminal investigation authorities and on highlighting trafficking in children and adolescents.

Nearly 1,200 police and Border Guard officers attended human trafficking training provided in the project.

The greatest investment in the IHME project, which also became its greatest success, was in human trafficking training for the criminal investigation authorities.

The premise for this was that the criminal investigation authorities had previously not had training specifically designed to improve their understanding of the phenomenon of human trafficking, victim identification, and investigations of cases of human trafficking. By the

end of the project, the situation was very different.

Both the police and the Border Guard now have a dedicated two-part training module in their Moodle environment, and additionally nearly 1,200 officers attended contact teaching sessions held for the criminal investigation authorities throughout the country.

The original goal in the project plan was to train some 180 police and Border Guard officers, and as can be seen, this goal was surpassed by a huge margin.

The training was found to work so well that the training co-operation between the Assistance System on the one hand and the Police University College and the Border and Coast Guard Academy on the other will continue after the project. From now on, all police and Border Guard students will receive the basic training on human trafficking created in the IHME project.

The icing on the cake is that other authorities have become aware of this training, and in autumn 2019 similar sessions will be held for instance at the Service Centre for Entry Permits of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

Study of human trafficking in children and adolescents yielded new information on the phenomenon in Finland

The greatest single effort within the IHME project in spring 2019 was the study of human trafficking in children and adolescents in Finland. Initially intended to produce an overview 30 to 50 pages long, the undertaking expanded into a thorough exploration of the phenomenon running to more than 100 pages. Without the contribution and expertise of the researchers at the European Institute for Crime Prevention and Control (HEUNI), the study would have been much less thorough.

Because there was practically no overview in existence of this phenomenon and its vulnerability factors, it is scarcely surprising that the report received widespread attention in the media at its publication seminar in Helsinki on 21 March 2019.

Persons involved in combating human trafficking found much that was familiar in the report, such as the description of Finnish children falling prey to various forms of sexual exploitation.

What emerged as a surprise in the study was the criminal exploitation in Finland, particularly of adolescents going AWOL from reform schools.

Media visibility is of the utmost importance in raising awareness of such practices and in preventing them. The publicity also resulted in the project manager's first-ever appearance on YLE TV News at 20:30.

Because of its high profile, the report has had a widespread impact. More than 170 persons attended the publication seminar and its follow-up seminar, both in person and by remote connection.

Several of the recommendations entered in the report ended up, in one form or another, in the Government Programme of the Government of Prime Minister Antti Rinne. Following the publication of the report, the National Institute for Health and Welfare (THL) decided to include the topic of human trafficking in children as a separate item in the Action Plan for Preventing Violence Against Children 2020–2025.

The IHME project also included discussions with the National Agency for Education concerning potential collaboration in the sector of schools and education. These discussions, along with the dissemination of the findings in the report, will continue in the years to come.

Work continues though officially the project is at an end

Although the IHME project has been officially concluded, work on the goals and outcomes of the



Minister of the Interior Kai Mykkänen (right) and project manager Veikko Mäkelä at the publication of the child trafficking report in March 2019.

project continues. The numerous collaboration efforts that grew out of the project and its outcomes will ensure this.

The materials created in the project and the ihmiskauppa.fi website will continue to be updated. This clearly demonstrates that the project has had an impact in boosting efforts to combat human trafficking in Finland.

On the personal level, the project manager and many others participating in the project have acquired increased expertise in human trafficking and how to prevent it.

The Assistance System and the project

manager would like to thank all participants, and hope that the cooperation established will remain fruitful in the future.

Project manager Veikko Mäkelä is returning to his regular duties as a Senior Adviser in the Assistance System. He may be contacted at veikko.makela@migri.fi.

The IHME project received EU assistance from the Internal Security Fund (ISF-P).



SISÄISEN TURVALLISUUDEN RAHASTO
– POLIISIYHTEISTYÖ, RIKOLLISUUDEN
EHKÄISEMINEN JA TORJUMINEN SEKÄ
KRIISINHALLINTA
Euroopan unionin tuella



THE ASSISTANCE SYSTEM REPRESENTS FINLAND ON THE COUNCIL OF THE BALTIC SEA STATES

According to the head of the Task Force against Human Trafficking, the human trafficking problem will continue to grow and endanger our security if we do not address it.

The Task Force against Human Trafficking (TF–THB) of the Council of the Baltic Sea States has been active since 2006. The Task Force consists of experts in combating human trafficking from 11 member states. Finland is represented in the Task Force by the Assistance System for Victims of Human Trafficking.

In the following pages, Head of the Task Force **Vineta Polatside** talks about the operations of the Task Force and how Finland contributes. Polatside paints a bleak picture of the growth and spread of human trafficking - if nothing is done about it.

We need more convictions for human trafficking!

Recently, the Task Force has focused on the fact that member states have been unable to convict perpetrators of human trafficking at a rate comparable to the number of victims identified.

Workshops are to be held in the Baltic Sea states for people involved in the criminal investigation process. The Assistance System will be hosting a workshop on labour exploitation, as this is an area that

Finland has been particularly successful in addressing.

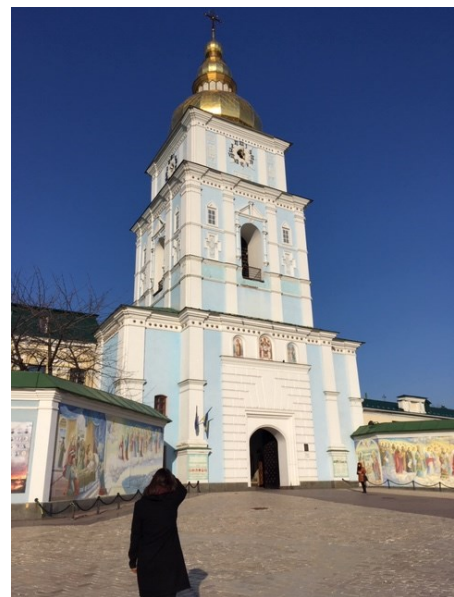
Guidelines for media

The agenda of the Task Force also includes drawing up guidelines for the media, to help them present a true and accurate picture of human trafficking to the general public. To this end, the Assistance System has conducted a study on how human trafficking is reported in Finnish news media (see p. 4).

Collaboration on human trafficking cases

In spring 2019, the Assistance System undertook fact-finding missions to Romania, Bulgaria and Ukraine. The purpose of these trips was to investigate the types of human trafficking from these countries to Finland, and to find out which actors are reliable contacts if a victim wishes to return home from Finland.

The Task Force is currently exploring the potential for the Baltic Sea states to co-operate more closely in cases of human trafficking. This applies both to the repatriation of



The Assistance System visited Kiev, the capital of Ukraine, in April 2019.

victims and to international criminal investigations.

Local authorities need reinforcement in combating human trafficking

Through its STROM project, the Task Force has sought to reinforce local authorities to improve their capacity for identifying human trafficking, surveying the human trafficking situation, and assisting victims. A guideline for municipalities was prepared and translated into all the member states' languages as well as into English.

COUNTER TRAFFICKING IN THE BALTIC SEA REGION



Vineta Polatside (4th from the left) speaks at the Romanian Ministry of the Interior in Bucharest in May 2019.

Have you heard about the Mariana trench? It is the deepest natural trench in the world, located in the Pacific. While thousands of climbers have successfully climbed the Mount Everest, the highest point on Earth, only a few people have descended to the planet's deepest point.

Being one of the most remote and fascinating places on Earth the Mariana trench is not immune to pollution. It contains extraordinary pollution levels. Pollution, ultimately, reaches all levels of our planet and life.

In that regard, exploitation and trafficking in human beings (THB) is just like pollution. It is something toxic entering the system.

It pollutes the society and the deeper we are looking, more severe it becomes. Just like with other toxic

phenomena THB cannot be eradicated by one country single-handedly.

To fight this crime in the Baltic Sea Region the Heads of Government came together in 2006 in Reykjavik and integrated a Task Force against Trafficking in Human Beings (TF-THB) into the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) framework. Since then the Task Force continues to strive for the Baltic Sea Region to become safer and more difficult for criminals to recruit and exploit vulnerable people.

Who are we and what exactly are we doing?

The TF-THB is a dedicated expert group consisting of government experts from eleven member states of the CBSS.

The National Assistance System for Victims of Human Trafficking

(Joutseno Reception Centre) represents Finland in this expert group and brings in extensive direct experience and expertise in identifying and assisting victims of human trafficking.

TF-THB gathers around the table policy makers with operational staff working directly with victims, including law enforcement officials, diplomatic and consular personnel, academia and civil society.

Although the number of human trafficking cases remains high, significant progress to counteract trafficking in human beings has been made in the Baltic Sea region.

Too many victims, too few convictions

The TF-THB tries to ensure that the common challenges of combating human trafficking in the region

become common priorities for the Member States.

Our current focus is on efficient prosecution and provision of victims' rights in criminal proceedings, because too many victims of human trafficking are identified, and many criminal investigations are initiated while too few criminal cases reach courts and are adjudicated.

A recent conference held in Riga "Human Trafficking - a crime with too few convictions and too many victims" clearly demonstrated that prosecuting human trafficking cases, especially for newer forms of human trafficking, like trafficking for labour exploitation, forced begging and criminal activities presents many challenges.

Following the conference, international workshops will be organised to train law enforcement officials and policy makers how to ensure more effective prosecution of human trafficking cases.

The Finnish National Assistance System will host the workshop focusing on prosecution of labour trafficking cases as Finland is the front runner in this field.

Bridging together different countries' victim assistance systems

We help CBSS countries to align their national interests with funding sources' priorities, bringing money where it is needed the most.

For example, currently we are bridging together national assistance systems of our member states insuring that transition of a

victim from one national assistance system to another one is as smooth as possible. It will also provide practitioners contact details of and information about the work carried out by relevant actors in other countries.

Helping journalists avoid harmful stereotypes

We also address the visibility of human trafficking and false presumptions that it is a hidden crime, by helping journalists to better understand the problem and to



shape how THB is communicated and portrayed in the media, for example by avoiding stereotypes and stigmatizing stories. The guidelines "Media and Trafficking in Human Beings" will be launched this October in Warsaw.

Strengthening municipalities in the fight against THB

We train national and local actors on how to fight crimes that are of global nature, to identify victims and prosecute criminals.

Within Project "STROM – Strengthening the role of Municipalities in the Work against Trafficking in Human Beings in the Baltic Sea Region" trainings were organized for local actors on how to step up

their action against human trafficking.

Developed guidelines for municipalities provide concrete steps how to map out the local trafficking situation, how to identify and assist victims and how to establish and strengthen measures to prevent trafficking in human beings and related exploitation.

"It can soon endanger all of us"

The Task Force also functions as an information center for Human Trafficking and related issues in the Baltic Sea Region. In autumn a third Human Trafficking 2019 Baltic Sea Region Round-up Report will be launched along with the comprehensive Human Trafficking Glossary.

There are still many challenges - objective and subjective - we need to address. The bad news is that there is no one big fix to eradicate THB, but the good news is that small improvements and developments are there.

As with pollution, it did not happen over one or ten years, but it can soon endanger all of us. We need to put in all our efforts now to make sure that perpetrators are vigorously pursued and prosecuted and victims of all forms of human trafficking are adequately assisted.

Vineta Polatside

**Senior Adviser and Head of Unit
Council of the Baltic Sea States**

PERSONNEL OF THE ASSISTANCE SYSTEM

The Assistance System currently employs three social work professionals and five Senior Advisers. The Assistance System's social guides are based at the Joutseno Reception Centre and Oulu Reception Centre. A social worker joined the team in August 2019, based in Helsinki. The social worker works with the Assistance System's clients together with the social guides. The Senior Advisers have offices in both Helsinki and Joutseno.

In summer 2019, the Assistance System had a university trainee working in administrative services.

The Senior Advisers as well as the social work professionals travel all over Finland to attend to clients' affairs, provide training, and take part in various net-

working events and seminars, where they give talks and discuss phenomena and issues related to human trafficking.

The Director of the Joutseno Reception Centre and the nurse who provides consultation assistance to the system also make an important contribution to the operation of the Assistance System.

In addition to working with clients, the Assistance System is a centre of excellence for identifying and assisting victims of human trafficking, and it provides training and consultation services. All employees of the Assistance System participate in discharging these duties.

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