

European Migration Network:

Finland screens victims of trafficking in human beings in advance

A victim of trafficking in human beings often remains unidentified at the stage where an applicant for international protection is already being removed from the country. Nevertheless, Finland places well in international comparison.

In Europe and in Finland, victims of trafficking in human beings are most likely to remain unidentified in forced return and Dublin procedures according to *Identification of victims of trafficking in human beings in international protection and forced return procedures*, a synthesis report published by the European Migration Network (EMN). However, determining the extent of the problem statistically is difficult, as the report indicates that the statistics maintained between different countries are inconsistent and incomplete.

The aim of the study was to examine whether potential victims of trafficking in human beings are detected and identified in European countries. The study concerned both applicants for international protection and those who have received a negative decision on their application for protection and are subject to forced return procedures. Forced return means that an asylum seeker has received a negative decision on the application for international protection and will be returned to his or her country of origin against his or her will.

Proactive screening of victims is not always sufficient

Finland's strengths in the international comparison include the fact that trafficking in human beings as a phenomenon is familiar here. The authorities know to expect that there are victims of trafficking in human beings among asylum seekers, and they are screened on a proactive basis.

- However, screening could be more active in cases where a negative decision has already been issued and the applicant is being removed from the country, which, according to the report, is the practice in countries such as the Czech Republic and Slovakia, suggests **Berit Kiuru**, Senior Adviser at EMN.

In Finland, the National Rapporteur on trafficking in human beings is the Ombudsman for Minorities, who, in 2014, will also begin to monitor the returns of foreign nationals.

- Frequently, a victim of trafficking in human beings will not speak until he or she absolutely must, due to fear of both his or her exploiters and the authorities. For this reason, an effort should be made to identify victims also in connection with forced returns, confirms **Venla Roth**, Senior Adviser at the Office of the Ombudsman for Minorities.

The identification of victims is made more difficult particularly by the Dublin procedure, which involves returning applicants, even unaccompanied minors, to the EU Member State in which they first applied for asylum. Victims of trafficking in human beings who apply for international protection in Finland have often been victimised elsewhere.

- International obligations require Finland to protect the human rights of all those identified as victims of trafficking in human beings, including those who enter into forced return procedures. Finland still has work to do in preventing these types of cases, Roth says.

Reception centres and non-governmental organisations provide support

Reception centre staff could also provide assistance in the identification of victims of trafficking in human beings in Finland.

- Victims often spend a considerable amount of time with people such as reception centre staff, nursing staff, psychologists and social workers. They may form a relationship of confidentiality with victims, Kiuru explains.

Joutseno reception centre, which is responsible for the National Assistance System for Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings in Finland, has participated in a project funded by the European Refugee Fund to increase awareness of the phenomenon of trafficking in human beings at reception centres. Staff have received training in skills such as identifying victims of trafficking in human beings and referring them to the national assistance system.

- The number of asylum seekers who are potentially victims of trafficking in human beings that have been referred from reception centres to the national assistance system has increased continuously, says **Katri Lyijynen**, Senior Adviser at the Joutseno reception centre.

Cooperation between non-governmental organisations and reception centres could be modelled after France. The synthesis report mentions that a French reception platform for asylum seekers has signed an agreement with the NGO Association Foyer Jorbalan (AFJ). A qualified psychologist working for AFJ assesses reception centre residents to identify victims of trafficking in human beings.

- Through the partnership, the reception centre staff have also learned to identify victims and communicate with them better, Kiuru says.

Children suffer the consequences of trafficking in human beings

A minor may become vulnerable when his or her parent applies for international protection and has been the victim of trafficking in human beings.

The parent may be in very poor psychological condition, which severely compromises his or her ability to protect the child's position. According to Senior Adviser Venla Roth, special attention must be paid in such cases to realising the best interest of the child and preventing the revictimisation of the parent.

- For example, there are pregnant Nigerian women who enter Finland and seek international protection. We must carefully consider whether they can be returned to a country where the child's parent has been subject to exploitation, Roth says.

The synthesis report is based on the results presented in 24 national reports compiled in cooperation between the European Commission, national EMN contact points and the EMN's service provider.

Trafficking in human beings is recognised as "the slavery of our times", a severe violation of fundamental rights and a serious form of crime. The EU recognises the need to detect and identify persons who have been subjected to trafficking and offer them access to assistance, support and protection. The EU also recently called upon Member States to use legislative means to increase their capacity to identify victims of trafficking in human beings.

You can access the synthesis report Identification of victims of trafficking in human beings in international protection and forced return procedures from the link:

http://www.emn.fi/files/907/EMN_Synthesis_Identification_Victims_Trafficking_Final_13March2014.pdf

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About the EMN

The Finnish National Contact Point for the European Migration Network (EMN) operates in connection with the Finnish Immigration Service. National contact points have been set up in each EU Member State, as well as in Norway, which also participates in the network. The network is chaired by the EU Commission.

The task of the EMN is to support policy-making in the European Union by providing up-to-date, objective, reliable and comparable information on migration and asylum. In addition to politicians and government officials, information is also disseminated to the general public.

Among the most important outputs of the EMN are annual reports on the development of the immigration policies of EU Member States and institutions, as well as various thematic studies on topical migration issues.

Finland's national EMN website is at www.emn.fi.