



National Rapporteur on Trafficking in
Human Beings and Sexual Violence
against Children

Human Trafficking Victims Monitoring Report 2016–2020

Management Summary

trafficking
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Management summary

It is clearer than ever that human trafficking is not an isolated problem. This is evident from the reports published by the National Rapporteur in recent years. The Human Trafficking Victims Monitoring Report 2016–2020 highlights this once again.

Accumulation of problems calls for more appropriate support

This edition of the Victims Monitoring Report also deals with the overlap between sexual violence and sexual exploitation, as well as the interconnectedness between human trafficking and other forms of subversive crime. In addition, it has become increasingly clear in recent years how victimisation and offending in human trafficking can overlap. This accumulation of problems and the knowledge that experiencing human trafficking can have long-term disruptive consequences for victims calls for the earliest possible detection, triage and appropriate protection. The government has the responsibility and crucial task to ensure these mechanisms and provisions are in place. This edition of the Victims Monitoring Report shows that the Netherlands still falls short in this area.

This is reflected by the fact that almost half of the presumed victims of human trafficking again fall victim to an offence within five years. These are often serious offences, such as being re-trafficked, but also abuse, threats and sexual violence. Moreover, the support available to victims was found to depend largely on circumstances such as the municipality where victims reside or their residence status whereas the support offered should depend precisely on victims' needs. A fundamental change in the approach to tackling human trafficking is required.

This has prompted the National Rapporteur to put forward the following recommendation:

RECOMMENDATION

Provide municipalities and professionals with an operating framework in order to provide appropriate support to all presumed victims of human trafficking.

The National Rapporteur recommends that the Minister for Migration and the State Secretary for Health, Welfare and Sport facilitate municipalities in offering appropriate support to victims of human trafficking. The National Rapporteur has further elaborated this broad recommendation into six concrete action perspectives. That way, he provides municipalities and professionals with the tools to provide support that appropriately meets victims' needs, especially the needs of three vulnerable victim groups: labour migrants, minors and victims in migration flows.

The six action perspectives are the following:

- A. Obtain specific insights into the local problems of human trafficking victims and offenders and how these problems relate to each other.
- B. Use these insights to provide input to municipalities and national sectors for well-informed human trafficking policies, including care procurement policies that are tailored to local problems.

- C. Ensure that municipalities and implementing bodies have the necessary expertise with regard to human trafficking victims, common underlying problems and the support needs of specific groups of victims.
- D. Draft a policy framework at the national level on the basis of which municipalities are able to offer support to labour exploitation victims as well as victims of serious harm.
- E. Make sure that it is clear to professionals which bodies or organisations they can refer to in order to provide timely support in case of signs of human trafficking and to ensure a smooth transition between the various forms of youth care, as well as from youth to adult care.
- F. Ensure clear coordination, continuity and a tailored approach when it comes to supporting victims of human trafficking in migration flows by making the support independent of residence status and criminal proceedings against any offenders involved.

The responsible ministries must facilitate easier access to care for victims by means of legislation and policy. For example, in the transition between various forms of support and in various financing flows for support. It is essential to guarantee local expertise in this process in order to organise and refer victims to appropriate support. The offender-based approach should also be strengthened by working more closely with various parties.

Victims of human trafficking

This edition of the Human Trafficking Victims Monitoring Report offers insight into the number of presumed victims that have been reported in the Netherlands from 2016–2020. In addition, the Victims Monitoring Report presents the first clear picture of the support victims receive and to what extent they are at risk of repeated victimisation.

IMPACT OF COVID-19

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, 2020 was a year like no other in all respects, both for society and for the approach to tackling human trafficking. People who already were vulnerable often found themselves in more distressful situations due to the restrictive measures. Labour migrants, for instance, had to work extra hours in the meat sector or in distribution centres and were unable to return to their own countries. Another example are sex workers who were unable to work, with limited entitlement to government support measures. Although causal relationships cannot be identified, this edition of the Victims Monitoring Report spotlights for the first time the impact of the pandemic on the number of reported victims of human trafficking.

Fewer victims on the radar

In 2020, over 25% fewer victims were reported to the Coordination Centre against Human Trafficking (CoMensha) compared to 2019, a decline from 1.334 in 2019 to 984 in 2020. This seems to have been brought about by the reduction in travel movements and the restrictions in investigation and detection activities due to the coronavirus measures. Some victims seem to have come more clearly into view due to the pandemic while other victims have become less visible.

More cases of labour exploitation have come to light that would otherwise have remained under the radar. Labour exploitation accounted for as much as 43% of all reports in 2020 compared to 17% in 2019. Most victims personally reported to welfare bodies when they lost not only their jobs, but also their accommodation and residence permits due to the coronavirus measures. It is concerning that these cases have not been identified far earlier by the investigative authorities.

Victims of domestic sexual exploitation have become less visible to CoMensha. The number of reports accounts for just 11% of the total number of reports while domestic sexual exploitation is estimated to be the most common form of human trafficking in the Netherlands, with minor victims accounting for a large share.¹ A considerable amount of victimisation has gone unnoticed. Nevertheless, it has emerged that there definitely are far more victims of domestic sexual exploitation than the number reported. In 2020, for example, the Dutch support and assistance site ‘Chat met Fier’ identified more anonymous victims of domestic sexual exploitation than the year before. It is concerning that these victims have not been able to find their way to the support and investigation services.

The number of victims of cross-border sexual exploitation and criminal exploitation reported has also declined drastically, from 668 reports in 2019 to 289 in 2020. The decline can be explained by the restriction on travel movements as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, the policy on victims with a Dublin indication has been adjusted, as a result of which they are less likely to be eligible for a temporary residence permit. This factor is also likely to have contributed to the decline.

Support insufficiently meet victims’ needs

Victims of human trafficking have widely diverse backgrounds and they often have complex problems. They include young victims, victims with multiple problems, foreign victims who were brought or came to the Netherlands under difficult circumstances, and combinations of these victim profiles. They often do not receive the specialist help and support they need because in many cases support depends on characteristics that are unrelated to their victimisation, such as residence status, place of residence and age.

Labour migrants, for instance, face the risk of being exploited due to their vulnerable position. Abuse related to poor employment practices and serious harm have often been going on for years. However, those affected are entitled to help and assistance only if they are officially a victim of labour exploitation, while they often are dependent on their employer in more ways than one. The lack of protection reduces victims’ willingness to cooperate and therefore hampers the thorough investigation of serious harm and labour exploitation. More importantly, victims do not receive the support they need. It is therefore crucial to lower the threshold for support to vulnerable labour migrants.

Minor victims need specialised youth care for long-term rehabilitation and to prevent repeated victimisation. Whether minor victims receive support differs by municipality because municipalities procure specialised youth care. Often the expertise required to provide such specialised care is also lacking. Moreover, youth workers tend to quickly consider placing victims in a secure institution in order to separate them from the trafficker. Many minor victims of human trafficking therefore end up in secure placements. In some cases, this is not necessary, while in other cases it is open to question whether a secure placement is an appropriate and effective way of providing protection.

Support for victims of cross-border sexual exploitation is linked to their right of residence. In turn, the right of residence is linked to the criminal proceedings against the offender. This has major consequences. A victim may be housed at four different shelters within a few weeks’

¹ National Rapporteur, 2017 (Human Trafficking Victims Monitoring Report 2012–2016).

time, depending on their status in the asylum procedure and the human trafficking regulation. The lack of a long-term residence can cause considerable stress and even lead to repeated trauma. It also has consequences for the usually location-based psychological support, counselling and specialist mental health support that is tied to residence status.

Repeated victimisation occurs alarmingly often

The Dutch government seems to be unable to provide sufficient protection to victims of human trafficking to prevent repetition or worse. Within five years, 45% of the victims again fall victim to an offence. Within seven years, that figure even climbs to 50%. Minor victims in particular seem to be more at risk of repeated victimisation. Multiple problems during their youth and in their home situation often play a role. This has also emerged from earlier research conducted by the National Rapporteur on cases of sexual violence against and sexual exploitation of children in Amsterdam.²

In order to properly protect victims, the welfare services should focus more on the wider context of the victims' problems and on the context in which the exploitation takes place. This calls for a tailored approach, long-term expertise and expert knowledge. Closer cooperation is also required in order to call upon the expertise of others, where necessary. That task lies primarily with the municipalities and the responsible Ministries of Justice and Security, and Health, Welfare and Sport. They are jointly responsible for the key principles underlying the prevention of repeat victimisation: early detection, correct diagnosis and providing the support needed.

² National Rapporteur, 2020 ('Reliance on Resilience').



Who is the National Rapporteur?

The National Rapporteur is Herman Bolhaar. The Dutch National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings and Sexual Violence against Children consists of the National Rapporteur and a team of enthusiastic employees with a multidisciplinary background.

What does the National Rapporteur do against human trafficking and sexual violence against children?

The National Rapporteur investigates the nature and extent of human trafficking and sexual violence against children in the Netherlands. In the annual monitoring reports and the thematic studies, the emphasis is on monitoring and improving the strategies for tackling human trafficking and sexual violence against children.

Based on information from a wide range of sources, the National Rapporteur advises national and local government, other administrative bodies, international organisations and professionals who provide help and support, on how to prevent and combat human trafficking and sexual violence against children.

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