

Dear colleagues, Ladies and Gentleman,

It is such an honour for me to be here today. A day like this shows that good practices in identifying and supporting child victims and children at risk of exploitation and trafficking is not only needed but also appreciated by the Nordic Council of Ministries and Council of the Baltic Sea States.

A little bit about my background. I am a Senior Advisor and Finnish Hotline manager in Save the Children Finland. I also work with victims of child sexual abuse as cognitive psychotherapist.

My area of expertise is online child protection and transnational crimes regarding child sexual abuse and exploitation related to digital environments. Finnish Hotline is a representative of ECPAT in Finland, and part of the INHOPE. Together with 47 countries, we fight against online child sexual abuse and exploitation in close cooperation with LEA.

Finnish Hotline received more than 4000 reports of possible illegal CSAM (so-called child pornography) in 2017, 66 percentages of the reports had images and videos of children under 12 years old being sexually abused.

Globally we know that there is a growing number of data, videos and images of young children who are sexually abused and whose abuse has been recorded and shared online. Through multidisciplinary co-operation especially with INTERPOL we know that there is a huge amount of children waiting to be identified, rescued and guided to safety and care.

IS IDENTIFICATION OF CHILD VICTIMS POSSIBLE? Why are evident signs of exploitation and trafficking often not followed-up?

There has been great achievements in strengthening the child rights based practices in identification of children at risk of exploitation and trafficking. For example thanks to Mr Dottridge the Reference guide on protecting the rights of child victims of trafficking in Europe is a great tool for professionals and authorities working in the field and now today we have Oslo Conclusions.

As pointed out many times today, combating trafficking and exploitation of children is extremely challenging and like Mr Dottridge said to identify child victims is even harder. The Oslo Conclusions clearly states that identification requires diversified measures ranging from the activity of a single individual citizen, professional and authorities to organizations and wider global cooperation with highly specialized LEA units combating organized crimes. Identification process needs us all.

In Mr Dottridge's presentation, he showed a list of factors that ensures better identification of vulnerable children. I would like to add some comments on that:

Listen to children and learn

Children are not miniature adults. Many elements, including stage of development, mental health, background and personality affects their ability to tell and reveal experiences of violence and exploitation. Though the world has changed, we must keep in mind that human brains are still the same. Traumatic experiences can lead to mental health states like PTSD were active "fight, flight, freeze"- mode affects negatively to the child's ability to recall and relate past painful experiences. Child friendly and sensitive communication enhance the child's feelings of safety and it helps to turns off the "fight, flight, freeze"- mode. This has positive effects on children and it enhances their ability to reveal and tell about painful and traumatic experiences often combined with emotions like shame and guilt.

Research, Training & Systematic reduction of prejudice and preconceptions

There is a growing body of literature and research on child victims but we have less research that focuses on the impact on professionals and authorities own beliefs, attitudes and experiences in identification of vulnerable children. Yet there is no doubt how important role this plays in identification of the child victims of trafficking and exploitation as Mr Dottridge pointed out.

What comes to prejudice we humans are prone to all kinds of belief biases. Faced with difficult decisions to make, we tend to use short cuts by using intuition-based knowledge and previous experience, even though such a strategy may lead to errors and wrong conclusions. We humans have a tendency to maintain our beliefs; even when we have the facts and evidence against them. This is how we are – it is human.

More training – to work together in multi-agency teams

Strong and persistent cooperation between professionals and authorities and pulling together the knowledge from different disciplines will ultimately improve the results in identifying child victims and vulnerable children.

Mr Dottridge's raised important facts and in my opinion the final key relays often in human factors. We should never underestimate the power of face2face calm interaction, patience and empathy when we work with children.

Basic child rights principles, multidisciplinary cooperation, Child sensitive communication, and evidence based interviewing techniques DO MATTER.

Knowledge and cooperation is a key to successful protection of child victims and children at risk of trafficking and exploitation. The guidelines of the "Oslo Conclusions" are an excellent example how to protect vulnerable children and child victims of trafficking and exploitation. To respect the rights of the child we must follow the Oslo guidelines. Child protection is everyone's responsibility.

Thank you.