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| **Oslo May 29, 2018 – PROTECT Children on the move conference** |

Deputy Minister Tom Erlend Skaug, Ministry of Children end Equality:

**Trafficking in children – the Norwegian situation**

**Introduction**

Thank you for allowing me to address you on this very important topic!

Child trafficking has a devastating and often lasting impact on its victims. As we know, children are trafficked for many reasons, including sexual exploitation, domestic servitude, labour, criminal activities such as pick-pocketing, theft and drug-dealing. Although there is no evidence of other forms of exploitation such as organ trade in Norway, all responsible agencies should remain vigilant.

Children can be trafficked into, within and out of Norway. Before arriving in Norway, children may have been exploited on the way. Any port of entry into our country might be used by traffickers. There are many legitimate reasons for and ways in which children are brought to Norway; some children travel with their parents or caretakers, others arrive accompanied by adults who are not related to them. In both cases, there may be reasons for concern, or not. To detect possible victims is challenging. Some accompanied children may apply for asylum, claiming to have arrived unaccompanied, after their traffickers have told them that by doing so they will be granted permission to live in Norway and be entitled to claim welfare benefits.

Whilst the majority of the child trafficking cases that we know of involve cross-border movements, there is also reason to suspect that child trafficking occurs within Norway. We need to pay particular attention to servitude within homes, sexual abuse or other forms of abuse that fall under the definition of trafficking. The traffickers may be the child's parents or caretakers. Some children are known to be forced to commit petty crimes or be involved in drug dealing, others are even sold by their parents for sexual purposes. You will be hearing about such a story later on in this conference. Hence, I would like to remind us all about the fact that crossing borders is not a requirement in the definition of trafficking, and we need to be alert on the domestic situation as well.

**What does the Norwegian Government do?**

The Norwegian Government aims to prevent and reduce human trafficking and to ensure that victims receive the help and support they need. While our Ministry of Justice is responsible for the fight against trafficking at large, the Ministry of Children and Equality is responsible for the care of victims below the age of 18 years.

Trafficking of children is a clandestine activity, which makes it difficult to identify victims and record numbers. Data on children and adults suspected of being victims of trafficking is collated through a coordinating unit (KOM). Strict regulations based on considerations for the protection of human rights and individual confidentiality makes it difficult to collect and store individual data.

Previously, we used to find girls to be exploited mainly for sexual purposes and boys for criminal activities. This modus operandi is not so clear-cut anymore. We have also seen a decrease in the estimated numbers of possible minor victims of trafficking. There is, however, little evidence that suggests an actual reduction in possible victims. In light of the large number of unaccompanied minor asylum seekers that arrived in Norway during 2015, one could suspect a rise in numbers, not the opposite. We have no explanation of these facts, but this may reflect the difficulties in detecting and identifying victims.[[1]](#footnote-1)

*Legislation*

There are policies and procedures for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. The statutory duties of a range of bodies and persons are explained in the legislation. However, in order to identify and follow-up victims of trafficking, we need to perfect our systems. First and foremost we must be better at identifying possible victims - we do not see what we do not believe to be there. The immigration authorities, the police and child protection services are all responsible for detecting, identifying, protecting and caring for potential victims. Everyone involved in the care of unaccompanied and trafficked children should be trained to recognize and understand the particular challenges likely to be faced by these children.

Protection measures may be implemented if these are necessary to prevent the child from contact with persons who constitute a risk for the child. The protection measures shall be specified in the placement order and not be more extensive than necessary. The measures may restrict the child’s right to receive visitors, to communicate by post, telephone or other communication equipment and to move around freely outside the institution’s premises. The measures may also impose restrictions on who may be informed of the child’s whereabouts. The protection measures may not impose restrictions that prevent the child from having contact with his or her guardian, legal counsel, child welfare service, supervisory authority, health personnel who provide treatment for the resident, clergyman, another spiritual adviser or the like.

The Norwegian Child Welfare Act section 4-29 regulates temporary placement without consent in the event of a risk of exploitation for human trafficking. The County Social Welfare Board may issue a care order regarding placement if the police find that there is an obvious and serious risk that the child is or may be exploited. It is a requirement that the placement is necessary to protect the child. And further, if the Board, on the basis of the police’s assessment and other information in the case, finds it likely that there is such an obvious and serious risk that placement is necessary to protect the child, and that the child cannot obtain adequate protection through other measures under this Act or in another manner. The County Social Welfare Board may only issue such order for placement up to six weeks. The placement may be extended for up to six weeks at a time by means of new orders. The total placement period may not exceed six months.

The child shall be placed in an institution that has the necessary expertise and resources to meet the child’s needs for protection and care. The child welfare service is responsible for his or her care, but the institution must provide everyday care on behalf of the child welfare service. The child welfare service shall continuously monitor the placement, and shall in collaboration with the police assess whether continued alternative care is necessary to protect the child. The police shall be informed and given an opportunity to state its opinion before the placement terminates.

*Plan of action*

During the last twenty years, the Norwegian government has issued five plans of action against human trafficking with a number of measures and substantial allocations. The latest plan was presented by five ministers in 2016 and has 26 measures, some of them particularly targeting minor victims. The continuation of the good cooperation within the Council of the Baltic Sea States and the project PROTECT Children on the move is especially mentioned.

In accordance with the requirements of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, we are currently working on a better system for the identification of victims. The recommendations from GRETA in the Council of Europe for a National Referral Mechanism (NRM) is clear. We also have strong incentives to target minors in particular. Our Parliament urges the Government to build competence within the child protection service in order to ensure that victims are identified and get the best possible help.

We do not yet know whether it is possible to build a national referral mechanism in line with GRETA's recommendations. However, there is a good cooperation between the different sectors and I strongly believe that we will be able to set up a mechanism in compliance with the intentions of the recommendations. Even today we have a system for collecting national data of the number of trafficked children, as well as information on trends, routes of travel and other details that may assist us in leading to the arrest and conviction of those who commit such crimes. As difficult as it is to prosecute these cases, we have actually had 14 verdicts concerning minor victims in the period 2003-2017.[[2]](#footnote-2)

**Conclusions**

Trafficking in minors is definitely on our agenda. We are currently aiming at creating a better platform for identifying and verifying victims, urging especially child protection services to increase their competence. Different measures can be applied; a specialized team that can advise and guide the child welfare services when they come across a possible victim. This is one of the options we will look into. A parallel system on forced marriages, FGM and honour-related issues have proven to be a viable solution.

We cooperate on a national, regional and international level. But we can do more. The cooperation within the Council of the Baltic Sea States is important and I am pleased to see the good result from the PROTECT-project.

I am convinced this conference will be constructive and interesting. Hopefully, new ideas will arise and fruitful discussions will take place. Keep up the good work, I wish you the best of luck!

1. 2014: 36

   2015: 42

   2016: 18 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. 14 minors out of a total of 46 verdicts [↑](#footnote-ref-2)