

Government Anti-Trafficking Coordinator of  
Finland

Congress of Local and  
Regional Authorities of the  
Council of Europe, Strasbourg

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Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues,

Thank you for granting me the opportunity to address you today. I will discuss how Finland has successfully strengthened its efforts to combat labour trafficking. As a result, the number of identified cases has increased and criminal liability is more often enforced, with proceeds of crime being confiscated.

In 2019, the previous government declared the fight against human trafficking as one of its key priorities. The Government Program incorporated a series of concrete measures aimed at enhancing anti-trafficking efforts and improving the situation of victims. A Government Anti-Trafficking Coordinator – that is me – was appointed to develop an action plan to address the issue.

However, the drafting process did not have to begin from scratch.

### Slide 1: Political will, strategy...

Firstly, over the years, **the independent National Rapporteur** has provided politicians with vital insights into human trafficking and issued recommendations on how to prevent and combat it more effectively. The Rapporteur has played a pivotal role **in shaping the political understanding of human trafficking while fostering the political will** necessary to tackle it.

Additionally, the media (**DIA: media!**) has critically highlighted—and continues to highlight—the inadequacies in anti-trafficking measures. This public discourse has prompted policymakers to take tangible action.

(DIA back!)

Secondly, Finland has been building expertise in the field of human trafficking for more than fifteen years. This includes the specialised Assistance System for Victims of Human Trafficking, which serves as a national centre of expertise while also providing services to numerous victims. Furthermore, high-quality research has been conducted, notably by the HEUNI Institute, which contributed to the drafting process of the Congress report.

The third point is the primary focus of my presentation.

### **Slide 2: Strong political will is key**

It was widely recognised that human trafficking distorts fair competition, undermines tax revenues, and threatens internal security. If allowed to proliferate, the consequences would extend beyond the suffering of victims and their families, affecting society as a whole.

The government resolved to place anti-trafficking efforts **high on its political agenda**, recognising trafficking not only as a grave violation of human rights **but also as a form of economic crime with far-reaching societal repercussions**. It became apparent that victims of human trafficking **are in a particularly vulnerable position** for numerous reasons, necessitating **a range of measures to detect this crime effectively**.

### **Slide 3: Strategy provides direction**

The action plan sought to translate the government's vision into practical measures. A broad spectrum of stakeholders—including local authorities, civil society organisations, and parishes across Finland—were engaged in the process. Workshops and consultations were held, gathering invaluable insights and experiences from local practitioners and survivors of human trafficking.

Ultimately, a responsible working group convened to establish shared objectives and devise proposals for measures that would address the identified challenges in the most effective and victim-centred manner possible. This was followed by an evaluation of additional funding needs, the assignment of implementation responsibilities, and the development of a comprehensive timetable for execution.

It is equally important to emphasise that effective implementation of the action plan necessitates **ongoing monitoring** and that those responsible for its delivery must receive expert support to ensure the measures are carried out effectively. My role has been to provide this indispensable support.

#### **Slide 4: Concrete examples**

For us, it was of utmost importance **to identify legislative or other factors that hinder victims from stepping forward to report exploitation to local authorities**. The underlying idea was **to introduce specific measures to ensure that victims of human trafficking could report crimes and seek assistance from authorities** without fear, for example, of immediate deportation. By enhancing the detection of human trafficking and the referral of victims to support services, the enforcement of criminal liability would be strengthened. This is because authorities would more often become aware of the crime, making it less clandestine and profitable.

- For example, the Government amended the Aliens Act to curb the exploitation of foreign labour and improve the status of victims. As a result, if there are reasonable grounds to suspect that a foreign national with a residence permit has been exploited at work, they will not lose their right to reside and work in Finland. In such cases, they may continue working for a new employer or apply for a new residence permit. This measure aims to improve the detection and identification of labour exploitation and trafficking.
- Regarding proactive measures, the Government Program prioritised ensuring that criminal liability for human trafficking offences is enforced. A new nationwide police unit was established to uncover and investigate human trafficking, with earmarked funding allocated to this initiative. Additionally, local police officers received training, and a concrete investigation manual was published to enhance the quality of crime investigations.
- Furthermore, the mandate of the Labour Inspectorate was strengthened, enabling it to intervene more effectively in cases of human trafficking and labour exploitation. Resources were increased at the local level to conduct proactive workplace inspections. The Labour Inspectorate plays a critical role in Finland's anti-trafficking efforts, as trafficking often occurs within local businesses across the country.

**(DIA: Not isolated projects but mainstreaming)** The objective was not to implement isolated projects but to integrate and mainstream anti-trafficking measures across all government policies and activities linked to human trafficking. Anti-trafficking efforts were incorporated into broader policy agendas addressing violence against children, gender-based violence, economic and financial crime, and labour exploitation, to name but a few.

In practice, new actors were involved in the fight against human trafficking, including tax authorities, and integration and employment authorities at the local level. These stakeholders received training and informational materials to help identify human trafficking and refer victims to relevant services. Even food security, civil aviation and pension authorities were included, as these entities may also encounter victims and intervene effectively.

(DIA back!)

Moreover, numerous research projects were initiated to collect information on the application of legislation, providing tools for local authorities. These projects explored how laws were being implemented, the challenges encountered, and how to overcome them. Significant training was provided to local authorities, accompanied by the publication of e-learning resources and other materials to improve the identification of human trafficking in practical situations.

#### **Slide 5: Key takeaways in summary**

1. **Strong political will is the foundation.** Without political backing, none of these initiatives would have been possible. A robust political commitment sent a clear message to ministries, subordinate administrations, and local authorities that anti-trafficking work **is an area deserving of investment.** The current Government has continued its work against human trafficking, for example, by adopting a specific Action Plan against labour trafficking.
2. Statistics often reveal little about the prevalence of human trafficking. It is crucial to build a comprehensive situational picture through alternative sources. Con-

duct research, listen to grassroots authorities and other practitioners, NGOs. Analyse the findings to determine what actions should be taken and how. Human trafficking must often be actively uncovered—**it will not reveal itself.**

3. and 4. Combating human trafficking is complex and cannot be reduced to the efforts of only the most apparent stakeholders. It requires the commitment of experts from various fields and local practitioners. It is vital to identify those authorities most capable of detecting, identifying, and preventing exploitation—many of whom may not be obvious candidates. **Mainstreaming anti-trafficking work and securing the commitment of grassroots practitioners and local authorities is essential.** In order to do this, the establishment of multidisciplinary networks of local authorities is needed. True, **impactful anti-trafficking work can only be conducted locally**, where practitioners operate directly with affected individuals. Their coordinated efforts must be supported by strategies, legislation, resources, and practical tools.
5. A vision is essential. It is important to paint a collective picture of where the country should aim to be in five or ten years. Envisioning, encouraging, and uniting stakeholders were central to my role. **Someone is needed to pull everything together.**

Ladies and Gentlemen, colleagues,

Human trafficking is not an unstoppable force of nature. **It can—and must—be prevented and combated.** While this is no easy task, even in Finland, where the rule of law, gender equality, universal healthcare, and low levels of corruption prevail, we must ask ourselves: what is the alternative? If trafficking is allowed to persist, society as a whole is the ultimate loser.

Thank you!