

# COUNTRY OVERVIEW

## Ending Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation: State-of-Play in light of the Lanzarote Convention

# FINLAND



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# PREFACE

The [Council of Europe Convention for the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse](#) was adopted on 25 October 2007 in Lanzarote, Spain and entered into force on 1 July 2010. As of April 2023, it has been ratified by all 46 Council of Europe member states and two non-member states, namely the Russian Federation and Tunisia. The Lanzarote Convention is the most ambitious and comprehensive international legal instrument on the protection of children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, covering all possible kinds of sexual offences against children, namely sexual abuse of a child – including within the “circle of trust”, exploitation of children through prostitution, grooming and corruption of children through exposure to sexual content and activities and offences related to child sexual abuse material.

In 2022, the Council of Europe joined forces with ECPAT International to prepare Country Overviews covering specifically the Parties to the Lanzarote Convention. Building on a process and methodology already established by ECPAT International, as well as, on extensive information gathered through the Lanzarote Committee’s monitoring procedure, these overviews aim to provide an effective tool for advocacy and advancing the fight against child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse in countries.

The Country Overviews bring in one document, the information submitted by Parties to the Lanzarote Convention, through the [General Overview Questionnaire](#), the recommendations adopted by the [Lanzarote Committee](#)<sup>1</sup> in its [monitoring rounds](#)

and additional desk-based research to fill in gaps as to progress made since such information and monitoring findings were adopted. During the process, drafts of the overviews were shared with ECPAT member organisations and other relevant organisations on the ground, who reviewed the content and supplemented the information with other local sources and analysis. The Country Overviews were done in close collaboration with the national authorities represented in the Lanzarote Committee. Where possible, the Country Overviews also include the perspectives of children and/or survivors. ECPAT International and the Council of Europe would like to express their profound appreciation for all valuable inputs during the process and would like to reiterate that the Country Overviews do not contain any new monitoring findings. Any suggestion on the way forward that does not stem from such findings is not binding on the countries. Similarly, any promising practice put forward by the national authorities to highlight its implementation of the Lanzarote Convention does not entail the Lanzarote Committee’s endorsement of it until it is presented to it in the context of a compliance procedure.

The Country Overviews present relevant legislation, policies, and other measures in place to tackle child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, and possible suggestions on the way forward. These are primarily based on Lanzarote Committee findings and are thus meant to reiterate what it has recommended. When this is not the case, they are mere suggestions on possible ways to enhance protection of children against sexual violence.

# AT A GLANCE

## KEY ACHIEVEMENTS



Many actions against the sexual abuse and exploitation of children have been taken including the adoption of the Non-Violent Childhoods: Action Plan for the Prevention of Violence against Children 2020-2025 and the Lanzarote Implementation Plan.

Statistics on child sexual abuse and exploitation are collected and survey-based research is used to monitor the safety and well-being of children from different perspectives.



Sex education is part of the national core curriculum and all teachers are trained in sexuality education as part of their university training programme.

Important efforts and steps in preventing child sexual abuse have been launched from the perspective of supporting persons with a paedophilic interest.



## KEY CHALLENGES

No separate funding will be allocated for the enactment of the Lanzarote Implementation Plan.



There is a need to centralise and agree upon a terminology to describe the various forms of sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children.



There is no mechanism for centralising all relevant data on child sexual abuse and exploitation in order to provide a comprehensive overview of the phenomenon.



There is no comprehensive understanding of how sexual abuse and sexual exploitation affects boys in Finland.



Research on the Internet usage by children with disabilities, who are particularly at risk of sexual exploitation and abuse, is missing.



It will be important for the authorities to continue to enhance legislation, policies, and measures to fight against sexual abuse and exploitation facilitated by information and communication technologies, including in line with the recommendations adopted by the Lanzarote Committee in its 2nd monitoring report.



# INTRODUCTION

Located in northern Europe, Finland shares land borders with Norway, the Russian Federation, and Sweden. Its territory is divided into 19 regions, including the Sámi Homeland,<sup>2</sup> and Åland,<sup>3</sup> an autonomous, demilitarised and Swedish-speaking region.

Finland's economy is considered highly industrialised with a small domestic market<sup>4</sup> and a gross domestic product per capita at US\$53,982.6 in 2021.<sup>5</sup> In 2019, around 873,000 people were at risk of poverty or social exclusion in Finland.<sup>6</sup> In the same year, 121,000 children lived in low-income families.<sup>7</sup> Finland reported the lowest rate of 16% of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the European Union in 2018.<sup>8</sup>

The Finnish economy, like the rest of the world was heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic resulting in a recession, mass layoffs and rising unemployment.<sup>9</sup> The pandemic exacerbated the economic conditions of families, but more so for families with children and those already living in poverty.<sup>10</sup> Reports suggest that more than 27,000 children had sought food donations and vouchers through the Save the Children Finland food aid project.<sup>11</sup> Poverty can be a significant determinant in not only perpetuating sexual exploitation of children but also in reinforcing its demand.<sup>12</sup> In general, the demand for sexual exploitation of children is more likely to be prevalent in areas and/or situations marked with economic destitution.<sup>13</sup>

In 2021, the Finnish population amounted to 5,548,241 of which 15.4% were children under 15.<sup>14</sup> In terms of gender equality, Finland was ranked 4<sup>th</sup> in the European Union on the Gender Equality Index.<sup>15</sup> However, in the submission to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women on Finland by Amnesty International in 2021, prevalence of violence against women in Finland was reported to have increased during the COVID-19 pandemic with reports also related to 'gender normalising' surgeries operated on intersex children, sometimes performed even without their consent.<sup>16</sup> While Finland is an ethnically homogeneous country, it also includes a small population of Roma people and indigenous Sámi community.<sup>17</sup> While the Roma population still experience hate crimes and discrimination,<sup>18,19</sup> the Sámi community face disputes over the ownership and use of land regarding access to resources in their traditional territory, of which 90% is owned by the Finnish Government.<sup>20</sup> The Council of Europe's Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) noted with concern in its 2019 report on Finland that there is a lack of both specialist and general services for specific forms of violence against women who live in the Sámi homeland.<sup>21</sup>

Despite Finland's above-average standards for protecting children against violence and guaranteeing their well-being, some gaps still prevail. According to the Finnish police,

almost 2,500 sexual crimes were reported between January to June 2021 (an increase by 25% from the same period in 2020), which included cases of sexual harassment, rape and sexual abuse of children.<sup>22,23</sup>

Moreover, findings from the School Health Promotion 2019 study suggested that 7% of students in grade 8, 9, in upper secondary and vocational institutions had experienced sexual violence.<sup>24</sup> While 10-13% of girls reported having experienced sexual violence at least once in the previous year, less than 5% boys experienced the same.<sup>25</sup>

The migration population has also been on the rise in Finland, with the rate of foreign-

born population in Finland having increased by 73% since 2010 until 2020, amounting to 7.3% of the population.<sup>26</sup> Family reasons are the main motivation for migrants and refugees to move to Finland, especially for women and children, a majority of whom have already experienced violence in their home country.<sup>27</sup> Vulnerabilities to and risks of child sexual abuse and exploitation among the migrant and refugee populations are further discussed in the section of this report on sexual abuse and exploitation of children in the context of crisis and emergency situations.

# CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION IN FINLAND

## 2.1 SEXUAL ABUSE OF CHILDREN

**Article 18 of the Lanzarote Convention defines sexual abuse as a) the engagement in sexual activities with a child who, according to the relevant provisions of national law, has not reached the legal age for sexual activities; and b) engaging in sexual activities with a child where: – use is made of coercion, force or threats; or – abuse is made of a recognised position of trust, authority or influence over the child, including within the family; or – abuse is made of a particularly vulnerable situation of the child, notably because of a mental or physical disability or a situation of dependence.<sup>28</sup>**

Global findings on the prevalence of child sexual abuse widely imply the crime as a gendered crime that disproportionately affects girls than boys.<sup>29</sup> However, increasing number of findings suggests that boys are also vulnerable and at-risk to child sexual abuse. Any child is therefore at risk of sexual abuse.<sup>30</sup> Child sexual abuse has a long-term adverse impact on children's physical, psychological, social and behavioural aspects of life.<sup>31</sup>

"Child sexual abuse" in Finland is used as an umbrella term which includes various in-person and online forms of sexual violence against children.<sup>32</sup> According to the information provided by the Finnish authorities for the purpose of this report, a total of 2,660 and 3,210 child victims of sexual crimes were reported to the police in 2020 and 2021 respectively. The information further indicates a combined total of 1,765 and 2,069 child victims of sexual abuse, aggravated sexual abuse and aggravated rape in 2020 and 2021 respectively.

Children in Finland are also increasingly suffering from sexual harassment.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, according to the information provided by the Finnish authorities for the purpose of

this report, 186 children in 2021 had suffered from sexual harassment as compared to 155 in 2018. Furthermore, a combined total of 317 calls were made to the helplines operated by the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare and the Family Federation of Finland in 2021 for sexual harassment and violence against children. According to the "kouluterveyskysely", a school health survey, which covers all Finnish children attending grades 4-5 and 8-9, 8% of children in grade 4-5 and 30% of children in grade 8-9 had experienced sexual harassment.<sup>34</sup> Two percent of children in grade 4-5 and 9% in grade 8-9 had experienced sexual violence.<sup>35</sup>

**3,210**  
child victims  
of sexual  
crimes were  
reported to  
the police in  
2021



Concerns over the limited availability of mechanisms for data collection on child sexual abuse and exploitation have been expressed by the United Nations Committee for the Rights of the Child<sup>36</sup> as well as by the Lanzarote Committee to all its State Parties including Finland.<sup>37</sup> Although questions on violence against children have been included in survey-based research since 2017,<sup>38</sup> official information from the government, for example on the profile of offenders or place of offence is still largely insufficient. Recent and specific research on the scale and form of sexual abuse of children in Finland is also quite limited, despite the Action Plan for the Prevention of Violence against Children 2020-2025 addressing all forms of violence against children.<sup>39</sup> Considering the dearth of such a mechanism and data on the phenomenon, the Lanzarote Committee in 2015 had already urged State Parties, including Finland to take the necessary legislative or other measures to set up or designate mechanisms for data collection or focal points at national or local level and in collaboration with civil society for the purpose of observing and evaluating, in terms of quantitative data collection, the phenomenon of the sexual abuse and exploitation of children in general and child sexual abuse committed in the circle of trust, in particular.<sup>40</sup>

The Lanzarote Committee's 1<sup>st</sup> monitoring round in 2015 focused on the sexual abuse and exploitation committed in the circle of trust, including legislative frameworks, preventive and protective measures undertaken and/or planned to address the

issue.<sup>41</sup> It argued that the vast majority of children are victims of people they trust.<sup>42</sup> Offenders can thus include members of the family, sports coaches, healthcare professionals *et cetera*, and can also include offenders met online under grooming circumstances.

As elaborated in Finland's replies to the thematic questionnaire of the Lanzarote Committee, there is no data collected regarding sexual abuse and exploitation of children in the circle of trust and no specific policies or strategies have been implemented to raise awareness on the issue.<sup>43</sup> The only relevant information on sexual abuse of children in the circle of trust pertains to the activity of the Family Federation of Finland and Finnish Sports which has established a support service for athletes who have been subjected to sexual abuse and harassment, including a helpline and online chat services.<sup>44</sup> This targeted service acknowledged by the Council of Europe, also offers training opportunities for people working in sports clubs and includes a material bank for professionals, young people and parents on preventing and detecting sexual abuse and exploitation in sport.<sup>45</sup>

However, the inclusion of sexual abuse and exploitation of children in the circle of trust within the broader awareness-raising campaigns and activities of protecting children against sexual abuse and exploitation,<sup>46</sup> makes it difficult to have a specific overview of the issue.

## SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN IN PROSTITUTION, THROUGH SALE AND TRAFFICKING AND IN THE CONTEXT OF TRAVEL AND TOURISM

Article 19 of the Lanzarote Convention defines **exploitation of children in prostitution** as the use of a child for sexual activities where money or any other form of remuneration or consideration is given or promised as payment, regardless if this payment, promise or consideration is made to the child or to a third person.

Article 4 of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings defines 'trafficking in human beings' as "the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs".<sup>47</sup>

In case of child victims, Article 4 (b) of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings specifies that "the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered 'trafficking in persons' even if it does not involve any of the means stipulated in Article 4 (a)".<sup>48</sup> In other words, the Convention recognises that children can never be willing participants to their own exploitation.

For its part, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution, and child pornography deals with the '**sale of children**', defined as "any act or transaction whereby a child is transferred by any person or group of persons to another for remuneration or any other consideration".<sup>49,50</sup>

The sexual exploitation of children **in travel and tourism** is defined as any "acts of sexual exploitation embedded in a context of travel, tourism, or both".<sup>51</sup> The Framework Convention on Tourism Ethics of the United Nations World Tourism Organisation recognises that the exploitation of children conflicts with the fundamental aims of tourism and should be strongly combated with the cooperation of all the States concerned.<sup>52</sup>

Globally, the exploitation of children in prostitution, the sale and trafficking of children for sexual purposes, and the sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism, more often than not, occurs in conjunction and not in isolation.<sup>53</sup> For example, the sexual exploitation of children in prostitution can

occur in different contexts, including but not limited to establishment-based settings (such as massage parlours, nightclubs, dance cafes, clubs and bars), street-based contexts, online based contexts, during conflict or humanitarian crises, through sale and trafficking and in the context of travel and

tourism, all of which, multiply and exacerbate children's vulnerabilities.<sup>54</sup>

Recent crime data and media reports suggest that in 2019, sexual exploitation, for example through prostitution or online means, were the most identifiable forms of exploitation that occurred in Finland.<sup>55,56</sup> As revealed by the 2018 investigative project by Yle - a Finnish broadcasting company, the phenomenon of "sugar dating", in which an older person pays to date someone younger through open and legalised online platforms, was identified to be on the rise amongst children in Finland.<sup>57</sup> Based on in-depth interviews with young people involved in this dating phenomenon, exchange of sex for money was indicated to be an important part of their encounters,<sup>58</sup> which the company described as "open prostitution".<sup>59</sup> While the media coverage demonstrates that this type of practice should not be legitimised, terms such as "prostitution" were also used, preventing the phenomenon from being recognised as child sexual exploitation. Similarly, another 2019 study on young people's experiences of transactional sex in the Nordic countries pointed out that despite the issue being recognised by the authorities and professionals who work with young people, the topic is rarely discussed and researched, with relevant sources and awareness-raising campaigns being very limited in Finland.<sup>60</sup> The findings additionally suggested that young people felt guilt and shame when professionals discussed compensation or prostitution.<sup>61</sup> Regardless of the situation of vulnerability of the young person, young people and professionals perceive transactional sex in a different manner. For example, professionals may act in a moralising manner, which may then lead young people to hide their situation even more, thus resulting in unreliable data.<sup>62</sup>

When it comes to sexual exploitation through trafficking, Finland is primarily a country of destination for trafficked persons, with the majority of presumed victims having been

exploited abroad before arriving or during their journey to Finland.<sup>63</sup> Both adult and child victims are often asylum seekers or from a minority group, and almost all are referred by relevant professionals to the Assistance System for Victims of Human Trafficking.<sup>64</sup>

According to the 2022 annual overview of the National Assistance System, in 2022 a total of 478 people were referred, and an additional 48 potential victims of human trafficking sought help from the Assistance System by themselves.<sup>65</sup> Out of the 429 clients new to the system, 346 were adults, and 83 children (62 being the children of the adults who had been referred).<sup>66</sup> Among the 367 victims, common forms of exploitation included forced labour (217), forced marriage (72) and sexual exploitation (64).<sup>67</sup> However, no disaggregated data triangulating age and type of exploitation are provided.

Although there is limited research on the scale and particularities of trafficking of children for sexual purposes, a 2019 study on Trafficking in Children and Young Persons in Finland stated that identifying and providing assistance to child victims is often delayed or even put aside if the exploitation occurred in a foreign country or if the authorities fail to determine who the offender is.<sup>68</sup> The identification of sexual exploitation through trafficking also differs amongst professionals and across the country.<sup>69</sup> In 2019, the Group of Experts on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA) urged the Finnish authorities to take steps to ensure that all victims of trafficking are identified so as to benefit from the assistance and protection measures provided by the Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings.<sup>70</sup> In particular, GRETA urged the Finnish authorities to introduce a national referral mechanism which defines the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders and promotes a multi-agency approach to victim identification by involving a range of frontline professionals and entities, including non-governmental organisations, labour

inspectors, social workers, health care and municipal staff.<sup>71</sup>

While drafting this report, no information was found regarding the sexual exploitation of children in the context of travel and tourism. With tourism rebounding after

the COVID-19 pandemic, risk for sexual exploitation of children might increase in any country, as offenders use the infrastructure of the industry, combined with online technologies to commit their crimes.<sup>72</sup> The topic is yet to be addressed by the Finnish authorities.

## SEXUAL ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN FACILITATED BY TECHNOLOGY

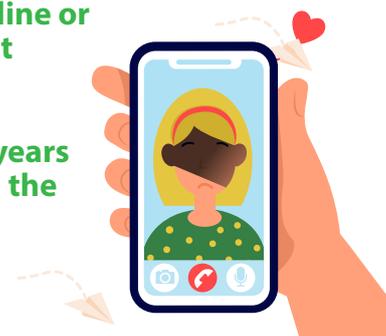
**Online sexual abuse and exploitation of children refers to situations involving digital, Internet and communication technologies at some point during the continuum of exploitation. It can occur fully online or through a mix of online and in-person interactions between offenders and children. Child sexual abuse and exploitation online includes an evolving range of practices including conduct related to child sexual abuse material (e.g. production, distribution, dissemination, possession of, etc.), grooming children online for sexual purposes and live streaming of child sexual abuse. Related concepts can include online sexual extortion, the non-consensual sharing of self-generated sexual content involving children and unwanted exposure to sexualised content, among others.**

As observed globally, the integration of digital technologies and children's access to the Internet is increasing exponentially.<sup>73</sup> As much as the transition to online spaces promises unparalleled benefits for the users, it nevertheless also increases the likelihood of children becoming exposed to online risks.<sup>74</sup> The blurred lines between online and offline spaces combined with the anonymity of the Internet makes it much easier for offenders to not only commit crimes online, but also potentially commit crimes simultaneously in offline spaces or vice versa.<sup>75</sup> Hence, any action taken to combat online child sexual abuse and exploitation should consider the wider ambit of children's online and offline activities and recognise technology as a cross-cutting issue.<sup>76</sup> The 2<sup>nd</sup> thematic monitoring round of the Lanzarote Committee focused on the protection of children against sexual exploitation and

sexual abuse facilitated by information and communication technologies.<sup>77</sup> Additionally, in 2022, GRETA also stressed the increasing use of technology for trafficking into sexual and/or labour exploitation.<sup>78</sup>

**62% of 1,762**

**surveyed children aged 11-17 had been contacted either by a known person online or by an adult who was suspected to be five years older than the child**



Internet usage in Finland is strong and widespread, with the Internet penetration rate at 97% of the total population at the beginning of 2022.<sup>79</sup> Social media is used by 85% of the population, with a 6% increase between 2021 and 2022.<sup>80</sup> In the context of the EU Kids Online Network,<sup>81</sup> a survey was conducted with children aged 9 - 16 among 19 European countries, including Finland, to gauge a better picture of their access and use of the Internet and associated risks and opportunities.<sup>82</sup> Among the Finnish participants, 97% had access to a smartphone, with 85% of them being online every day, mainly for online gaming.<sup>83</sup>

**“ Images that you don’t want and that you haven’t asked for. Messages that you didn’t want. The first thing you see on your phone in the morning can be such a message. They come from both adults and other young people. ”**

**Young person**

Workshop organised by

Save the Children Finland, 2022

In 2021, 1,762 children aged 11-17 responded to a survey organised by Save the Children Finland with the objective to examine how they understood, identified and experienced online grooming.<sup>84</sup> The findings revealed that 62% of the total 1,762 children had been contacted either by a known person online or by an adult who was suspected to be five years older than the child.<sup>85</sup> Interestingly, 1,274 of the total 1,762 children reported that they would be able to identify an offender trying to groom them, with contacts that are clearly sexual in nature, such as receiving sexualised

messages, asking for or receiving nude pictures from the offender.<sup>86</sup>

They also reported on the frequency of receiving messages with sexual content and nude pictures. 17% of the children who had been contacted online, received messages with sexual content weekly and 29% received them at least once a month.<sup>87</sup> Regarding receiving nude pictures, 13% received them weekly and 25% at least once a month, with girls receiving more sexual content and nude pictures from adults.<sup>88</sup>

Among the study participants, 662 children disclosed their grooming experience to someone, 617 children disclosed predominantly to a friend, and 333 children did not disclose to anyone.<sup>89</sup> The findings also showed that if children had close friendships and if parents were aware of their child’s online behaviour, it lowered the risks of online grooming.<sup>90</sup> Overall, the situation in Finland seems to confirm global trends and evidence.<sup>91</sup>

**662**  
**333**

children disclosed their experience to someone  
617 disclosed to a friend

children did not disclose to anyone



A 2020 situation report published by the Koordinaatti Centre of Expertise for Digital Youth Work, discussed the findings of a survey on sexual harassment, grooming and sexual violence faced by children and young people in Finland.<sup>92</sup> The results indicated that

out of the 456 respondents, mainly youth workers from municipalities or organisations working with children aged 13-17, most reported lacking effective tools and methods to deal with issues related to grooming and sexual violence among children and young people.<sup>93</sup> Lack of expertise regarding digital security skills, knowledge of legislation on sexual offences and forms of grooming and online sexual violence were also identified among the youth workers.<sup>94</sup>

According to Protect Children, there is widespread public support in Finland for stronger laws and regulations for protecting children online.<sup>95</sup> Technological solutions may be needed to be advanced to identify, report, and remove child sexual abuse materials in Finland.<sup>96</sup> In 2021, *Suojellaan Lapsia* Protect Children launched two surveys in the dark web to gather information on the users of child sexual abuse material.<sup>97</sup> Out of the 8,484 respondents of the surveys, 70% stated first viewing child sexual abuse material when they were under the age of 18, with nearly 40% saying they were under 13.<sup>98</sup> While 52% of the respondents felt afraid that viewing child sexual abuse materials might lead to sexual acts against a child, 44% reported that viewing such materials made them think about seeking direct contact with children and 37% reported of seeking direct contact with children after viewing.<sup>99</sup> The study thus suggested that the existence of child sexual abuse material online leads to further sexual abuse and to thoughts of committing crimes of sexual violence against children.<sup>100</sup> The connection between viewing child sexual abuse material and seeking direct contact with a child has also been demonstrated in academic research.<sup>101</sup>

### **Child self-generated sexual content**

Self-generated sexual content may involve children who take pictures or videos of a sexual nature of themselves for personal use,<sup>102</sup> but in some cases, children are

also groomed, deceived or extorted into producing and sharing their images and/or videos.<sup>103</sup> As per the 2021 annual report by the Internet Watch Foundation, out of the 252,194 actioned webpages, about 72% (182,281) were assessed as possessing self-generated content.<sup>104</sup> The number had increased by 28% as compared to 2020 when the number of actioned reports containing self-generated content was 68,000 (44%).<sup>105</sup>

The focus of the 2<sup>nd</sup> thematic monitoring round by the Lanzarote Committee was narrowed down to address child self-generated sexual images and/or videos to support State Parties in responding to the challenges put forth by this widespread practice.<sup>106</sup> As highlighted by the Lanzarote Committee in 2022, the phenomenon of child self-generated sexual content is under researched across the State Parties, including Finland, and more efforts are needed to collect data at the national and local level.<sup>107</sup>

As reported in the 2021 report by Save the Children Finland on the Experiences of Children on Online Grooming, child self-generated sexual content in Finland is usually produced by children in their own house, as visible through the pictures.<sup>108</sup> Children are also quite comfortable with asking for or sharing self-generated sexual content to their peers and starting conversations with strangers.<sup>109</sup> Because of the potential 'consent' involved in producing and sharing self-generated sexual content, children who had been coerced to produce and share such material have often been blamed for their situation of abuse and/or exploitation, resulting in children not reporting cases.<sup>110</sup>

As noted in its 2022 implementation report, the Lanzarote Committee recommended all State Parties, including Finland, not to criminalise sexual activities and experiences between persons of similar ages and maturity.<sup>111</sup> Furthermore, the Lanzarote Committee's Opinion on self-generated

sexual content argued that Parties should ensure that all children are protected from possible criminalisation when engaging in self-production of sexual images/videos for private use only.<sup>112</sup>

### **Sexual abuse and exploitation of boys**

Globally, factors associated with debilitating socio-economic conditions, heteronormative beliefs and attitude, notions of masculinity, family maltreatment, migration, and lack of awareness of the vulnerabilities of boys to sexual abuse and exploitation are identified as some of the key factors that multiply the risks for sexual exploitation of boys across the world.<sup>113</sup> Despite findings of global research strongly suggesting the higher risks and vulnerabilities for boys to sexual abuse and exploitation, extensive research, knowledge and awareness is still very scarce.<sup>114</sup> As a result, boy victims of sexual abuse and exploitation have been largely excluded in policy and targeted interventions.<sup>115</sup>

“ [The sexual violence] faced by girls is talked about more, but it happens to guys too. ”

Young person  
Workshop organised by  
Save the Children Finland, 2022

According to the information provided by the Finnish authorities for the purpose of this report, in 2021 there were 262 male and 2,948 female victims of sexual offences under 17 years old. Although the number of boy victims appears to be significantly less than girl victims, it should not be discounted, considering that it is already challenging to estimate the severity of the occurrence and impact of sexual exploitation of boys.<sup>116</sup> As discussed in the Global Review of Existing

Literature on the Sexual Exploitation of Boys, discriminatory practices and attitudes towards boy victims of sexual exploitation, lack of services available for boys, lack of understanding amongst service providers and lack of social support-based response pathways are some of the key factors impeding help-seeking behaviour of boys.<sup>117</sup> Similar findings have been reflected in another study which indicated that gendered understandings of boys and young men have shaped conceptions of transactional sex in Finland.<sup>118</sup> Further, the study argued that young men seeking asylum are mostly regarded as perpetrators of sex offences and not as potential victims of sexual abuse and exploitation.<sup>119</sup>

Although there is a significant lack of research focusing on the sexual abuse and exploitation of boys in Finland, few studies and surveys have been carried out in the country providing an overview of the issue. According to the study by Save the Children Finland, 37% of 317 surveyed boys aged 11-17 had received messages with sexual

**Of 317 surveyed boys aged 11-17,**

**37%** had received messages with sexual content a few times a year

**32%** received nude pictures a few times a year



content and 32% had received nude pictures at least a few times a year.<sup>120</sup> In the context of sports, a 2020 study with responses from more than 9,000 Finnish competitive athletes,<sup>121</sup> concluded that men belonging to a sexual minority experienced stronger sexual harassment, although there is no further data disaggregated by age.

The Family Federation of Finland, *Väestöliitto*, maintains a helpline and web service for boys and young men to discuss issues and questions surrounding them, including

situations of violence.<sup>122</sup> However, information on the number of calls received and reported situations of violence is unavailable.

“ **Regardless of gender you get everything.** ”

**Young person**  
Workshop organised by  
Save the Children Finland, 2022

## CHILD, EARLY AND FORCED MARRIAGE AS A FORM OF OR AS A PATHWAY TO SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

**The Terminology Guidelines for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (Luxembourg Guidelines) define ‘child marriage’ as “a marriage in which at least one of the parties is a child. It also refers to the act of marrying off children, usually young girls, with or without their consent”. Child, early and forced marriage can be understood both as a form of or as a pathway to<sup>123</sup> sexual exploitation.<sup>124</sup>**

**Article 37 of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence recommends States Parties to do the necessary to ensure that those forcing a child to enter into marriage, and those who lure them into another country for such purpose, are criminalised.<sup>125</sup>**

The root causes of child, early and forced marriages are largely founded on religious beliefs, cultural practices, gender norms, traditional customs, but also on parental perceptions of mitigating family economic burdens, especially in the case for young girls.<sup>126</sup> Considering these driving factors, child, early and forced marriages can also then be understood as a form or pathway to sexual exploitation when it involves an exchange for financial or other compensation or leads to trafficking for sexual purposes, exploitation in prostitution, or exposure to difficult situations that may

be abused by offenders of child sexual exploitation.<sup>127</sup>

Additionally, global findings on this phenomenon widely suggest the disproportionate impact on the advancement and development of girls. However, the impact on child grooms cannot be discounted given that marriage may force boys to take on the role of adults. This places economic pressure on boys who might not be prepared and also possibly curtail future opportunities for them.<sup>128</sup>

Although quantitative data on child, early and forced marriage in Finland is lacking, three key features have been identified in previous research.<sup>129</sup> First, there are young people of foreign background who are sent home to be married to older men. Second, there are young foreign women who were forced to marry in their home countries and came to Finland. Third, there are men with foreign backgrounds living in Finland who find an underage wife in their home country and are married abroad and/or in Finland.<sup>130</sup> As further detailed in the section of this report on national legislation, the legal age of marriage is 18 and in 2019 the government banned the possibility for

special permits that allowed for 'early' child marriage. Prior to the ban, officials would receive 10-30 application permits a year.<sup>131,132</sup> In addition, girl victims of child, early and forced marriage, have also reported of excessive family control, hence depriving them from reporting their situation to the authorities.<sup>133</sup> Similarly, GREVIO indicated in its 2019 Baseline Evaluation Report that cases of forced marriage were on the rise and that girls of migrant backgrounds had difficulties reaching out to Finnish authorities for protection.<sup>134</sup> In 2020, the Finnish Ministry of Justice published a guideline on forced marriages and their consequences in criminal legislation.<sup>135</sup>

## SEXUAL ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION OF PARTICULARLY VULNERABLE CHILDREN

Despite the lack of statistics on sexual abuse and exploitation of particularly vulnerable children, the wealth of qualitative studies conducted in Finland identifies some main trends on the topic. Self-reporting School Health Promotion surveys that include violence-related questions are regularly sent to a number of schools, which show that Finnish children and young people in vulnerable situations, experience significantly more violence than their peers.<sup>136</sup> Children in vulnerable situations can include children with disabilities, children of foreign origin, children belonging to sexual or gender minority groups, and/or children placed outside the home.<sup>137</sup>

A 2020 study demonstrated that in Finland, children with disabilities were 3.53 times more likely to suffer from serious violence, including sexual violence, than their peers.<sup>138</sup> In reference to the European Union, similar findings were also identified indicating that children with a disability related to mental illness or intellectual impairments were 4.6 times more likely to be at risk of sexual violence.<sup>139</sup> According to the National

Child Strategy, the coordination of services provided for children with disabilities in Finland is inadequate.<sup>140</sup>

In addition, recognition of their vulnerabilities as well as their right to self-determination in health and social services are neither taken into account by the Child Welfare Act nor by the Intellectual Disabilities Act.<sup>141</sup> Considering that globally many parents and care takers might seek to respond to the needs of a child with a disability through technology to keep them occupied, leaving them unsupervised might put them in contact with potential offenders.<sup>142</sup> Thus, additional research producing accurate and reliable data on the sexual abuse and exploitation of children with disabilities is needed globally,<sup>143</sup> including in Finland.

Children and young people belonging to gender and sexual minorities also have increased risk of experiencing sexual violence.<sup>144</sup> The 2021 report on the Experiences of Children on Online Grooming highlighted some of the online risks

experienced by children who did not define themselves either as male or female.<sup>145</sup> For example, 73% (58) of children who defined their gender as "other" were found to be contacted the most online by a person at

least five years older, as compared to 34% of boys and 67% girls.<sup>146</sup> Therefore, this group of children were at higher risk of being subjected to online sexual violence.<sup>147</sup>

## SEXUAL ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN IN THE CONTEXT OF CRISIS AND EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

**Crisis and emergency situations refer to situations of armed conflicts and terrorism, migration and forced displacement, health and economic crises, natural disasters, including climate change, and any other unforeseen events that may hamper children's enjoyment of all their human rights.**

In 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic brought unprecedented challenges worldwide. Important decisions such as lockdowns had to be made, which impacted all communities, families, and society as a whole. In March 2020, the Government of Finland declared the COVID-19 pandemic as a state of emergency and was entitled to exercise powers under the Emergency Powers Act.<sup>148,149</sup> Schools were closed, restrictions on movement were imposed and border controls were reintroduced. Consequently, children and young people had their lives completely upended, with many turning to online environments for distant learning and socialising opportunities.<sup>150</sup>

Authorities highlighted that because of greater unsupervised access to the Internet and the reduction in the provision of preventive services, children were at a higher risk of becoming victims of online sexual abuse and exploitation.<sup>151,152</sup> This is further emphasised in the 2021 survey by Save the Children Finland. Although contacts between adults and children grew online,<sup>153</sup> there were fewer reports received by Save

the Children Finland's hotline *Nettivistijä*.<sup>154</sup> Despite the increasing rates of domestic violence during this period, the Central Union for Child Welfare Finland noted that the number of reported cases of child abuse to the police had decreased by 45% and that fewer reports of violence against children had been identified by child protection services.<sup>155</sup>

In April 2020, the Lanzarote Committee's Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson issued a statement on strengthening the protection of children against sexual abuse and sexual exploitation in times of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>156</sup> In particular, the focus was on the higher risks faced by children in vulnerable situations and urged its State Parties, including Finland, to ensure a safe environment for all.<sup>157</sup> Children belonging to different minorities (indigenous Sámi people, asylum seekers, children in closed institutions or with disabilities) were deemed to have been particularly affected by COVID-19 in Finland.<sup>158</sup> However, little information is available on the safety and preventive measures undertaken in this respect by the authorities.<sup>159</sup>

Although the overall impact and consequences of COVID-19 on children in Finland have yet to be fully assessed, it has certainly highlighted the differences in support provided to children across the region, and as a result, increased inequalities in education, care and protection from sexual abuse and exploitation.

Despite the fact that Finland is not at the centre stage of any specific environmental catastrophes, military conflicts nor is it a country of immigration, the year 2015 provided a shift in its internal policies regarding migration, with millions of Syrians fleeing to Europe to escape violence and persecution, which led Finland to receive an unprecedented number of asylum seekers, including minors.<sup>160</sup> To assess whether children had been victims of sexual abuse and/or exploitation, the Finnish Immigration Services included questions in every interview in possible situations of sexual violence.<sup>161</sup> However, as reported by Save the Children Finland, the time taken by asylum procedures increased the risk of children being sexually exploited or abused, especially while in reception centres.<sup>162</sup> As reported by the Finnish Government in its replies to the Lanzarote Special Report, there was a high possibility that child victims of sexual abuse and exploitation were not being identified, in addition to cases of disappearance during the asylum process making them particularly vulnerable to exploitation in Finland.

An issue of growing concern is the impending consequences of the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. This has resulted in over 50,000 Ukrainian nationals applying for

temporary protection in Finland (as of March 2023)<sup>163</sup> with a significant number being children and their mothers. The Assistance System for Victims of Human Trafficking did not have any reports on new clients being admitted to the system due to exploitation in 2022.<sup>164</sup> In the Guidance Note published by the GRETA in May 2022, all State Parties, including Finland, were called upon to act urgently to protect people fleeing the war in Ukraine and to proactively take steps to prevent human trafficking.<sup>165</sup>

As previously mentioned, if a child victim is an asylum seeker, they will be reported, for example by immigration officers to the Assistance System for Victims of Human Trafficking for support. Reporting is based on whether or not immigration officers are sufficiently trained for that purpose and since the Finnish Immigration Services do not compile any statistics regarding the grounds for which people have sought asylum, there is no specific data collection mechanism to assess the number of child victims of sexual abuse and exploitation within the context of the refugee crisis.<sup>166</sup>

In the context of the 2015 refugee crisis, the Lanzarote Committee had already invited all State Parties, including Finland, to ensure to put in place effective mechanisms for data collection with a specific focus on children affected by the refugee crisis who are victims or presumed victims of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse and review the possible removal of obstacles to the collection of such data, in particular, where they exist, legal restrictions to do so, with due respect for the requirements of personal data protection.<sup>167</sup>

# INTERNATIONAL COMMITMENTS AND LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

## INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL COMMITMENTS

Status of ratification of relevant international and regional instruments		
Instrument	Date of ratification or accession	Entry into force
Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse - 2007	09/06/2011	01/10/2011
Revised European Social Charter <sup>168</sup> - 1996	21/06/2002	14/06/2002
Council of Europe Convention on Cybercrime - 2001	24/05/2007	01/09/2007
Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings - 2005	30/05/2012	01/09/2012
United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child - 1989	20/06/1991	20/07/1991
Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography - 2000	01/06/2012	01/07/2012
Optional protocol on a communications procedure - 2011	12/09/2015	12/02/2016
ILO Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour - 1999 (No. 182)	17/01/2000	16/01/2001
UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and children – 2000	07/09/2006	7/10/2006

In terms of international cooperation and commitments, beyond the international and regional

legal instruments ratified and adopted by Finland, as per the table above, it is worth mentioning that Finland submitted its latest Voluntary National Review on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in 2020.<sup>169</sup> The report noted that Finland's response to trafficking for purposes of sexual exploitation is

inadequate and that it does not criminalise forced marriage or child marriages contracted abroad.<sup>170</sup> The government's legislation reform (discussed below) was highlighted as a key policy response.<sup>171</sup>

## NATIONAL LEGISLATION

## AND RECORDED OFFENCES

In 2023, substantial changes to sections pertaining to sexual crimes under the Criminal Code have entered into force. These changes introduce several new offences relating to children, revamp a number of existing offences and increase minimum punishments for various sexual offences. This section describes these provisions and also draws upon crime statistics. Whilst crime statistics cannot be used to determine true prevalence of sexual offences against children, as many instances of abuse and exploited go underreported,<sup>172</sup> they may be useful in highlighting certain trends.

In terms of general provisions related to children's rights, the Child Welfare Act establishes that any person under 18 is considered a child.<sup>173</sup> In addition, the Marriage Act states that the minimum age for marriage is 18, with no exceptions.<sup>174</sup> In Finland, cases of forced marriage can be prosecuted as human trafficking.<sup>175</sup> However, this means that where the elements of trafficking are not met, forced marriages may not be prosecutable. Instead, forced marriages of children should be an offence in its own right, as stipulated in the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combatting violence against women and domestic violence.<sup>176</sup>

### *Sexual abuse of children*

The Finnish Criminal Code sets the age of consent at 16 for children of any gender.<sup>177</sup> Offenders who have sexual intercourse with a child below this age are sentenced to imprisonment between two to 10 years for child rape.<sup>178</sup> The legislation mentions specifically that in the case where a parent or equivalent guardian has sex with a child aged 16-17, they will be convicted of child rape.<sup>179</sup> In addition, there are a number of aggravating factors, the presence of which could see the penalty rise to between four

to 12 years imprisonment.<sup>180</sup> The recent modifications to the Criminal Code have increased the level of protection offered to children as previously child rape, which did not involve forcing or particular helplessness<sup>181</sup> of the victim, was usually prosecuted as sexual abuse of a child or aggravated sexual abuse of a child,<sup>182</sup> which carry lower sentences.

Additional relevant provisions include the criminalisation of those who abuse their position to participate in sexual intercourse or engage in another sexual act with a child under 18 "who is under their control or supervision in a school, institution, employment or leisure activity or in another comparable subordinate relationship with them," or with a child "whose ability to independently decide on their sexual behaviour is substantially weaker than that of the perpetrator due to his immaturity and the age difference between the parties" will have committed sexual abuse.<sup>183</sup> This offence carries a punishment of between four months and four years, unless an equal or more severe punishment for the act is provided elsewhere in the criminal legislation for these acts.<sup>184</sup> Furthermore, the offence of sexual 'abuse'<sup>185</sup> of a child criminalises touching or committing a sexual act to a child under 16, punishable with between four months and six years of imprisonment.<sup>186</sup> Like the child rape provisions, children aged 16-17 are only covered by this provision where the offence is committed by a parent or equivalent guardian. The presence of one of the aggravating factors<sup>187</sup> results in the punishment of between two to 10 years imprisonment.<sup>188</sup> For cases involving children aged 16-18 that do not involve a parent or guardian, the provision on aggravated sexual abuse applies, punished by imprisonment between one to six years.<sup>189</sup>

Regarding the offences of child rape, aggravated child rape, sexual abuse of a child and aggravated sexual abuse of a child, the Criminal Code provides that it is not an offence when a child's right to sexual self-determination has not been violated and where there is no large gap in age or maturity between the parties.<sup>190</sup> Although exact age parameters for this exemption from criminal liability are not provided, it could be used to avoid the prosecution of cases in which sex between peers is voluntary and consensual.<sup>191</sup> What will be considered a large gap in age will be dependent on the age of the child in question; the younger the child the smaller the gap in age that will be deemed acceptable.<sup>192</sup> Further, the Code provides that where the offence has been committed under mitigating circumstances, the offender must be sentenced to imprisonment between four months and six years for sexual abuse of a child. The factors that will be considered include age and maturity of the child and the offender, the relationship of the parties and other circumstances of the act.<sup>193</sup>

Provisions on rape in general – not specifically of children - were also revamped in 2023 to ensure that the absence of consent is the key factor, rather than the use of violence or threat. Thus, from 2023, anyone who has sexual intercourse with a person who does not voluntarily consent,<sup>194</sup> will have committed the offence of rape.<sup>195</sup> Listed as an aggravating factor, this offence will carry a punishment of between two to 10 years when committed against a child under 18.<sup>196</sup> Given that offences against children under 16 can be prosecuted as aggravated child rape under the new provisions, this provision has particular relevance in providing protection to children aged 16-17, ensuring the same level of protection as the offence of child rape.

Before 2023, an offender who had sexual intercourse with a child under 16 could be convicted of aggravated rape in addition

to sexual abuse/aggravated sexual abuse of a child, if they used violence, threat or if the child was in fear or in a helpless state.<sup>197</sup> However, the threshold for determining that a child was in fear or in a helpless state has proved difficult to meet. This was evidenced by a Court of Appeal of Turku decision in 2017 involving a ten-year-old child.<sup>198</sup> The child's young age or the fact that the offender was a stranger were not considered sufficient in and of themselves to determine that the child was in a state of fear or helplessness.<sup>199</sup> Therefore, the case was prosecuted using the provision on aggravated sexual abuse, as was often the case in these circumstances.<sup>200</sup> This is reflected in official crime statistics shared by the Finnish authorities for the purpose of this report that show that between 2018 and 2020 there were 289 prosecutions for aggravated sexual abuse of a child and only 12 prosecutions for aggravated rape.

### ***Sexual exploitation of children in prostitution, through sale and trafficking and in the context of travel and tourism***

Although the criminal legislation of Finland contains provisions that protect children from being exploited in prostitution, loopholes do persist and there remains room for improvement. Whilst debates around the legislation of adult prostitution are a separate argument, it is important to highlight that adult prostitution, whether criminalised, decriminalised and/or regulated, can influence the exploitation of children in prostitution, which frequently occurs adjacent to adult prostitution - legal or otherwise.<sup>201</sup>

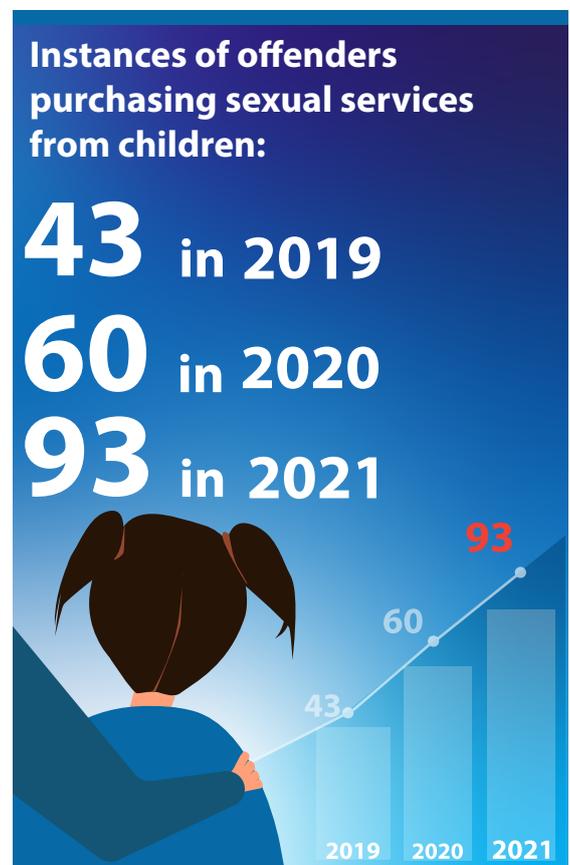
Despite the absence of a specific definition of exploitation of children in prostitution under Finnish law, the Criminal Code criminalises certain conducts relating to this form of exploitation. The offence of offering payment for a sexual act on a young person involves promising or giving remuneration

to encourage a child to engage in sexual intercourse or sexual acts.<sup>202</sup> The punishment for this offence ranges from the minimum sentence of a fine to the maximum sentence of two years' imprisonment.<sup>203</sup> In addition, the provisions on child rape and sexual abuse described above could also be applied to exploitation of children in prostitution.<sup>204</sup> In order to bring the legislation in line with international standards such as the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (hereinafter referred to as the Lanzarote Convention)<sup>205</sup> and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography,<sup>206</sup> Finland may consider the adoption of a legal definition of 'exploitation of children in prostitution' that explicitly covers the use of children for sexual purposes for any form of consideration (i.e. also not financial). This includes the mere promise of remuneration (as already provided in the current legislation) and regardless of whether this remuneration or promise of such is given to the child or to a third party. Properly defining the exploitation of children in prostitution is vitally important in protecting children from being prosecuted as offenders and in raising awareness of the offence and the harm it may cause. Further protection could be offered to children by raising the minimum sentence for the offence of purchasing sexual services from children, as the fine penalty does not reflect the grave nature of the crime. In fact, aggravated sanctions would be imposed only if other criminal provisions are engaged.

According to the information provided by the Finnish authorities for the purpose of this report, in 2019 there were 43 instances of offenders purchasing sexual services from children, 60 in 2020 and 93 in 2021. However, this translated to only two convictions each in 2019 and 2020. Data on the number of convictions was not available for 2021, thus emphasising the need to step up efforts

at identifying, prosecuting, and convicting offenders of such crimes.

The Criminal Code also contains offences that protect children in Finland from being trafficked for sexual purposes. Anyone who takes advantage of someone in a dependant position, unsafe conditions or by applying pressure, who deceives or takes advantage of the error of another, or who pays or accepts compensation from someone who controls another in order to take another person under control, recruit, hand over, transport, receive or accommodate another person in order to subject them to sexual abuse will be guilty of human trafficking.<sup>207</sup> Where this offence is committed against children, it will be considered aggravated and the punishment will be set for imprisonment between two to 10 years.<sup>208</sup> Importantly, for crimes involving children it is not required for any of the means of trafficking (i.e., taking advantage of dependants, deceiving, paying compensation etc.) to be proven in order for an offence to be committed.<sup>209</sup>



The Criminal Code also states that the law applies to international trafficking offences irrespective of the place of commission.<sup>210</sup> However, trafficking is often associated with solely being an international, cross-border crime, and has been misconstrued that movement is a necessary component of the offence.<sup>211</sup> Therefore, the explicit recognition of domestic trafficking would improve the Finnish legislation.

With regards to the sale of children for sexual purposes, the Criminal Code provision on trafficking in human beings punishes whoever takes control over another person under 18 or recruits, transfers, transports, receives or accommodates such a person for the purpose of subjecting them to sexual abuse.<sup>212</sup> In line with the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography that criminalises the “offering, delivering or accepting, by whatever means, a child for the purpose of sexual exploitation”,<sup>213</sup> Finland may consider to explicitly and separately criminalise the sale of children. Although when joining the Optional Protocol, the existing trafficking provision was deemed to be fulfilling the requirements regarding criminalisation of the sale of children, the Committee on the Rights of the Child has highlighted in its 2019 Guidelines on the implementation of the Optional Protocol, the importance of explicitly criminalising this crime.<sup>214</sup>

The organisation of travel arrangements or transportations that are explicitly or implicitly meant to create or facilitate opportunities to engage children in sexual activities is not criminalised in Finland. However, there are certain provisions that could give some protection to children from being sexually exploited in this context, such as the possibility for legal entities to be prosecuted for certain crimes of child sexual abuse and exploitation.<sup>215</sup> This means that a fine may be issued where a person who is part of a company or organisation’s

management, or who exercises decision-making authority has been an accomplice in an offence, allowed the commission of an offence or has not exercised the necessary diligence to prevent the offence.<sup>216</sup> This fine is set at a minimum of €850 and a maximum of €850,000.<sup>217</sup> In addition, under the Law on Business Prohibition, a person may be banned from doing business when they have committed any sexual offence against children.<sup>218</sup>

### ***Sexual abuse and exploitation of children in the online environment***

The Finnish Criminal Code contains several offences that protect children from sexual abuse and exploitation in the online environment and through the use of technology. This is also reflected in the new legislation. Crimes committed online are ever evolving and to fully protect children, it is vital that the law keeps pace with new ways in which offenders seek to exploit children. Conduct involving child sexual abuse materials is prohibited under the offence “distribution of a sexual image depicting a child”.<sup>219</sup> This provision criminalises “anyone who manufactures, sells or rents, or otherwise offers or makes available, keeps available, exports, imports to the country or through Finland to another country, or otherwise distributes an image or visual recordings” that sexually and factually or realistically depict a child.<sup>220</sup> The picture or visual recording is deemed factual when it has been produced in a situation in which a real child has been a victim of a sexual offence conduct.<sup>221</sup> It will be deemed realistic if it is deceptively similar to an image or visual recording produced through photography or in another equivalent manner in a situation in which the child has been portrayed in a sexual manner.<sup>222</sup> The law refers both to “factually” covering situations when it is a real child and a real situation of abuse and “realistically” when it is a realistic image of a non-existent child and/or a real child in a simulated sexual

activity, as long as the simulated sexual activity is realistic, i.e. in a misleading manner resembles a situation where a child is depicted sexually. Whilst the legislation includes 'realistic depictions of children' in the definition of child sexual abuse material, the provisions only cover images or visual recordings, disregarding written or audio materials.

The penalty for such crimes ranges from a fine to imprisonment of two years, and six years of imprisonment for aggravated offences.<sup>223</sup> The offence will be considered aggravated "if the child is particularly young, the picture also shows serious violence or particularly humiliating treatment against a child, is committed in a particularly planned manner, or is committed as part of the activities of an organized criminal group".<sup>224</sup> Documentation related to the preparatory work for this provision,<sup>225</sup> indicates that no precise age limit is set regarding the particular young age of the victim because it may be difficult to determine the age of the depicted child. Therefore, the aggravated penalty is intended to be applied to the most reprehensible images, depicting children of exceptionally young age.

In addition, the Criminal Code also punishes those guilty of possession or obtaining access to child sexual abuse material with a minimum penalty of a fine to a maximum of two years imprisonment.<sup>226</sup>

The Criminal Code prohibits the solicitation of children for sexual purposes, also known as grooming. This provision punishes anyone who suggests a meeting or other contact with a child with the intent to prepare sexually offensive pictures or visual recordings to commit other sexual offences with a penalty ranging from a fine to one year of imprisonment.<sup>227</sup> Although the legislation does not make explicit reference to grooming offences committed in online settings, the general wording of

the provision might allow such conducts to be prosecuted anyway.<sup>228</sup> The evidence of the risks that children in Finland face online grooming (as also presented in the sections above), emphasises the need for robust legislative protection against this crime. According to the information provided by the Finnish authorities for the purpose of this report, there were 163 instances of solicitation of a child for sexual purposes in 2019, 173 in 2020 and 118 in 2021. However, in 2019 and 2020 this led to only four and two convictions, respectively.

### Instances of solicitation of a child for sexual purposes:



Despite the offences listed above, legislation criminalising online child sexual abuse and exploitation can be further improved to better protect children. For example, live streaming of child sexual abuse is not explicitly criminalised under the Finnish legal framework, although there is a possibility to prosecute it under the offence of distribution of an image depicting a child in a sexual manner,<sup>229</sup> and provisions on sexual abuse for the portion of the abusive conduct committed in-person. As recommended by the Committee on the Rights of the Child for State Parties, State Parties, including Finland should regularly assess and revise its legislation to guarantee

that its legal framework is adapted to the new technological advancements, therefore including the live streaming of child sexual abuse.<sup>230</sup>

Whilst the general crime of extortion is covered under the Criminal Code,<sup>231</sup> sexual extortion is not listed as a separate offence. However, even when it does not lead to the aimed sexual act, extortion committed against a child under 16 may additionally constitute sexual abuse of a child per se, including attempted child rape or attempted sexual abuse of a child. Although the legislation does not include an explicit clause which excludes a child's criminal liability for producing and sharing self-generated sexual content, the liability of the depicted child is excluded under the general principles of law (self-harm is not punishable). Moreover, the Government proposal does state that the purpose of the provision in the act is not to punish consensual sharing and production between young people. Such acts have not been prosecuted in practice.

Beyond the criminal legislation, there are several other laws that may help to protect children from online harm. First, the 'Law on Measures to Prevent the Distribution of Child Pornography' allows police to monitor and compile lists of websites containing child sexual abuse material.<sup>232</sup> The police then work with Internet service providers to block such websites.<sup>233</sup> Based on Interpol's "Worst of" list, the police provide Internet service providers with a list of sites containing child sexual abuse material that are to be blocked.<sup>234</sup> The preliminary investigation is supported by specific requests to Internet service providers to obtain evidence or to identify the parties involved. Furthermore, the police maintain the supposed blocking list provided for in law. The list includes around 2,000 sites sharing child sexual abuse materials, all of which are located outside Finland. This list is also shared with the main network operators however, the action is voluntary for operators, and it is up to them

to decide how to implement the blocking list. If a user attempts to access such sites which are included in the blocking list, the user will end up on the police information page, thus it is a preventative action.

### ***Prosecution of offenders of sexual abuse and exploitation of children***

According to the information provided by the Finnish authorities for the purpose of this report, in 2021, there were a total of 526 suspects for the crime of rape or aggravated rape of a child. Of these, 346 were male, 9 were female and among the remaining 171 cases, the gender of the suspect was unknown. For sexual abuse of a child and aggravated sexual abuse of a child, there were a total of 2,050 suspects in 2021. Of these, 1,193 were male, 67 were female and for the remaining 790, the gender was unknown. Additionally, in 2020, 256 persons were convicted for various crimes of sexual violence against children. Of these, 129 were convicted of sexual abuse of a child, 86 for aggravated sexual abuse of a child and 19 for possession of child sexual abuse material.

The Finnish Criminal Code establishes extraterritorial jurisdiction. Illegal conduct (including sexual crimes against children) carried out by Finnish citizens and permanent residents abroad will be prosecutable. This also applies to citizens and permanent residents of other Nordic countries (Denmark, Iceland, Norway and Sweden) who are caught in Finland.<sup>235</sup> This is subject to a double criminality requirement,<sup>236</sup> meaning that in order to be prosecutable, the crime must carry a maximum sentence of over six months imprisonment in Finland. However, the double criminality and six month requirement is waived for trafficking crimes,<sup>237</sup> and the double criminality requirement for all other sexual offences against children covered in the sections above.<sup>238</sup> This application of active extraterritorial jurisdiction can thus be a

useful deterrence tool. Laws influence social norms and define 'acceptable behaviour' in any society. Including comprehensive active extraterritorial legislation sends a clear message that countries will not let their citizens take a 'holiday' from their legal systems and that sexual exploitation of children is unacceptable, no matter where it happens.<sup>239</sup>

Offences committed against Finnish children abroad will also be prosecutable under the Criminal Code.<sup>240</sup> However, the passive application of extraterritorial jurisdiction will be subject to a double criminality requirement when the offender is not a Finnish national or a permanent resident or a Nordic national or resident caught in Finland. Therefore, in order for such crimes to be prosecutable, it must have a maximum sentence of over six months imprisonment in Finland as well as be recognised as a crime in the place where it was committed.<sup>241</sup>

Considering that not all sexual offences against children have a maximum sentence

of over six months, this could leave Finnish children unprotected when the conduct is committed abroad, as in the cases of sexual harassment and abuse of a person subject to sex trade.<sup>242</sup>

The Act on Extradition states that offenders may be extradited for crimes committed in Finland as long as "legal investigation of the crime in the country requesting the extradition is considered appropriate" and the punishment attached to the crime in the requesting country is not that substantially different from the punishment under Finnish law.<sup>243</sup> Separate legislation exists for extradition to Nordic countries (Denmark, Iceland, Sweden and Norway) and Member States of the European Union. Regarding Nordic countries, extradition will be granted for offences that carry a custodial sentence in the requesting state.<sup>244</sup> For European Union Member States, a double criminality provision requires that the offence carry punishment of one year imprisonment in the requesting state and be considered an offence under the Finnish law.<sup>245</sup>

# FINLAND'S RESPONSE TO SEXUAL ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN

## COORDINATION AND COOPERATION

In Finland, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare<sup>246</sup> are the main bodies responsible for coordinating the country's response against the sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children. In 2019, the Non-Violent Childhood Action Plan 2020-2025 was published, containing 93 measures to prevent all forms of violence faced by children.<sup>247</sup> Although not specifically aimed at addressing the sexual abuse and exploitation of children, this action plan takes into account the different environments in which violence against children may happen, thus providing recommendations and actions to be taken by governmental authorities, the public and professionals working in direct contact with children.<sup>248</sup> In most of its measures, the action plan foresees training of professionals as key in preventing violence against children and in detecting and accompanying its victims. Little information is, however provided on the number of training sessions to be organised, their time-frame and expected results. The Central Union for Child Welfare Finland argued that despite national plans of action being satisfactory, a more operational attitude should be initiated to put recommendations and actions into practice. In this regard, making training for professionals obligatory would be an important step forward.<sup>249</sup>

In 2018, the Implementation Plan for the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combatting violence against women and domestic violence was launched.<sup>250</sup> The Plan contained 46 measures targeted at the

relevant ministries, including establishing referral centres for sexual violence at each university hospital across the country, availability for children over 16, and additional awareness-raising activities in education.<sup>251</sup> Despite this important step, the voluntary training of professionals on domestic violence and sex offences such as forced marriage was however criticised by GREVIO as lacking and consequently having an impact on investigations and support to victims thereafter.<sup>252</sup>

In 2022, the National Action Plan for the implementation of the Lanzarote Convention was also adopted.<sup>253</sup> The measures discussed in this Action Plan are categorised under the themes of prevention of violence, protection from violence and promotion of national and international collaboration to combat sexual exploitation and sexual abuse.<sup>254</sup> The various actions presented cover areas such as raising awareness on sexual violence against children, strengthening sexuality education, supporting research on treatment programmes, and organising various support groups.<sup>255</sup> What remains unclear is whether legislation will be changed, or how children, who are particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation, will be targeted by these measures. Most importantly, no separate funding will be allocated for the implementation of this action plan, which jeopardises its efforts to reduce violence against children.

A key feature of the Lanzarote Implementation Plan is the integration and implementation of the Barnahus (children's

house) model, in which all professionals working in direct contact with the child victim or suspected victim are brought together under one roof to cooperate in the child's best interests.<sup>256</sup> Recognised in 2015 as a promising practice by the Lanzarote Committee, in 2019 the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health funded the Barnahus project as a national initiative to implement the project around the core of five university hospital expert units specialising on forensic psychology and psychiatry, named Barnahus-units.<sup>257</sup> Additionally, in 2021, the European Union-Council of Europe Joint Project Barnahus was also launched to support the Finnish authorities in addressing the needs and challenges identified through the launch of the 2019 project and with the aim of reducing any existing delays in the pre-trial and judicial processes involving children.<sup>258</sup> While the legal methodology applied by the Barnahus model will be assessed in following sections of this report, the multidisciplinary cooperation efforts initiated by the Barnahus model are significant.

In addition, some initiatives have been launched, such as a new public handbook on child crime investigation based on the methods applied by the Barnahus model and published by the National Police Board in 2022.<sup>259</sup> There is also a national website with relevant awareness-raising material for professionals.<sup>260</sup> While the benefits from this joint-operating system of the Barnahus model are recognised, its effects are yet to be assessed in Finland. Considering that most recent action plans refer to the Barnahus unit as central in detecting sexual violence and in subsequently providing support to victims, it is expected that most child victims will be directed to the units.<sup>261, 262</sup> It is therefore paramount that the Barnahus model is rapidly standardised and strengthened to support all child victims of sexual abuse and exploitation throughout the country.

In addition to the actions provided by the above-mentioned Plan, a range of

non-governmental organisations and governmental authorities have collaborated to protect children from online sexual abuse and exploitation. For example, Save the Children Finland runs the Finnish Hotline *Nettivilhje* and works closely with the National Bureau of Investigations, or through the Finnish Safer Internet Programme.<sup>263</sup> Under the leadership of Save the Children Finland, the National Audiovisual Institute and the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare, the Finnish Safer Internet Programme raises awareness of online sexual abuse and exploitation and coordinates both the hotline for tackling child sexual abuse material and a helpline to provide advice.<sup>264</sup>

In addition to the measures and plans presented by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, the Ministry of Justice published an Action Plan in 2020 against Trafficking in Human Beings,<sup>265</sup> which became a necessary add-on as recommended by GRETA in 2019 regarding the urgency to adopt a national action plan addressing all forms of trafficking in human beings.<sup>266</sup> One of the priorities of the Plan is the improvement of the identification of victims.

Overall, all the above-mentioned plans are in their early stages, hence no evaluations on their impact are available yet. Importantly, Finland has demonstrated efforts to develop actions against the sexual abuse and exploitation of children despite the burden of the COVID-19 crisis. However, since little information was available on the budget allocated for each plan, nor any information on monitoring the impact of planned activities are outlined, a strong focus should now be placed on ensuring their effective implementation. Further, it is worth noting that all the above-mentioned plans indicate the need to centralise and agree upon a terminology for use in describing the various forms of sexual abuse and sexual exploitation.

The 2020 Koordinaatti study on the sexual harassment, grooming and sexual violence faced by children in Finland, highlighted this necessity, arguing that different terms are being used by professionals thereby creating confusions and impacting the support provided to victims, data collection and the cooperation between relevant agencies.<sup>267</sup> While one of the objectives of the Non-Violent Childhood Action Plan 2020-2025 is to produce terminology guidelines for health and welfare professionals, the plan also defines child sexual abuse as sexual violence, referring “to any act, whether actual

or attempted, that causes or may cause physical, sexual, mental or financial harm or distress”.<sup>268</sup> This definition which combines both sexual abuse and sexual exploitation, and consequently all other forms of violence such as harassment and grooming could potentially have an effect on developing specific strategies and actions towards child victims. To this effect, the publication of terminology guidance on sexual violence against children by the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare in 2022 is a positive step forward.<sup>269</sup>

## PREVENTION MEASURES, AWARENESS-RAISING AND EDUCATION

In accordance with the Lanzarote Convention and the recommendations stated by the Lanzarote Committee, Finland is expected to take the necessary legislative actions and implement strategies to prevent and protect children from sexual abuse and exploitation. A central aspect to preventing sexual violence is raising children’s awareness in accordance with their age and maturity and including this information in the school curriculum. Equally important is to ensure the screening of professionals working closely with children and offering intervention programmes, when needed, for those who fear they might commit sexual offences against children.<sup>270</sup>

“ [We need] Better sex education, so that you know what it really is. I can’t know if I’ve been harassed if no one has told me what it is. ”

”

Young person

Workshop organised by  
Save the Children Finland, 2022

In terms of preventive measure, protection from sexual abuse and exploitation is offered by the Finnish legislation that regulates employees working with children. This requires employers to request a criminal background check for all employees who will work with children.<sup>271</sup> Furthermore, the legislation has since been extended to the use of volunteers who are working directly with children. However, in the case of volunteers, this is not a legal obligation but merely a right to do so.<sup>272</sup>

Finland has initiated actions for raising awareness on sexual abuse and exploitation. For example, the Family Federation of Finland has trained the education sector in understanding children’s bodies, emotions, and confidence. They also created a webpage for professionals for recognising the signs of sexual abuse and a website with material for helping prevent and detect sexual harassment at school.<sup>273</sup>

In addition, sex education or what is also known as “safety education”<sup>274</sup> in Finland, is usually well established in the school curriculum and covers content related to biology, reproduction and puberty.<sup>275</sup> However, up-to-date information and comprehensive teaching of safety skills

education differs across municipalities and apart from qualitative surveys, little research is available on the impact this education has on children, parents and on the prevention of violence.<sup>276</sup>

“ **Sexuality, safety skills and consent have been discussed, but very little, with wrong terms in a roundabout way.** ”

Young person

Workshop organised by

Save the Children Finland, 2022

Although raising awareness of sexual violence against children is part of the Lanzarote Implementation Plan, and specific actions target children, such as knowledge-based campaigns on security skills and sexual violence are programmed, it is unclear whether these will be pursued in a regular manner or if sexual abuse and exploitation, including in the circle of trust, will be integrated in the general sexuality education at school.<sup>277</sup>

With regards to preventing sexual abuse and exploitation online, important collaborative efforts have been made with the private sector. For example, the Online Road Safety was initiated by the non-governmental organisation *Suojellaan Lapsia* (Protect Children) and funded by Google.org<sup>278</sup> to enhance children's digital safety skills. In 2021 Save the Children Finland and Telia, a private telecommunication company, launched a digital parenting package to help parents support their children in digital life with a series of online child-friendly videos about online privacy and data protection on YouTube.<sup>279</sup> Additionally, as part of the Finnish Safer Internet Centre, in 2021 Save the Children Finland published a guidebook for young people and in 2022 a guidebook for parents which both have information on

online grooming and child sexual abuse.<sup>280,281</sup>

In 2018, the Lanzarote Committee urged Finland, as a first step, to assess the danger and possible risks of repetition of sexual offences against children and then put in place a tool or procedure to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention programmes or measures.<sup>282</sup> Following these recommendations, the Ministry of Justice and the Funding Centre for Social Welfare and Health Organisations funded the Prevention Project *SeriE* with the Sexpo Foundation. The project (2018-2022) provides free support, such as therapy and a helpline for people in Finland who feel they might commit sexual offences against children.<sup>283</sup> It is also possible to seek help through the public health care system,<sup>284</sup> such as the mental hub *Mielenterveystalo.fi*, which offers a self-help programme in collaboration with Save the Children Finland.

In 2019, this programme which provides general information on the paedophilic disorders and examples of coping mechanisms to prevent offences was extended into the dark web by the non-governmental organisation *Suojellaan Lapsia* (Protect Children) in collaboration with the developer of the Ahmia search engine in the Tor-browser.<sup>285</sup> Although not specifically targeted to Finnish users of the dark web, analysis of the usage of the online self-help programme showed that providing anonymity and non-stigmatising support services for those who search for child sexual abuse material is inevitable.<sup>286</sup> In 2021, a new and more user-friendly ReDirection Self-Help Program was developed.<sup>287</sup> The ReDirection Self-Help Program is targeted specifically for individuals wanting to change their harmful behaviour and stop their viewing of child sexual abuse material.<sup>288</sup> The Program is available in English and Spanish with Finnish, Russian, Norwegian, Swedish, Czech, Slovak, Portuguese, and German versions being added in 2023 – 2024.<sup>289</sup>

In 2022, Save the Children Finland together with Save the Children Denmark published a tool for professionals working in contact with adolescents who are sexually attracted to children, with a focus on recognising the signs and providing support to prevent possible offences.<sup>290</sup> The tool, which works as a guidebook, represents an important step in preventing child sexual abuse from the perspective of supporting those with a paedophilic interest. It contributes towards an understanding of the stigma and challenges experienced by those concerned and as a result, offers assistance and prevents offences.<sup>291</sup>

Further, the private organisation *Silta-Valmennus* was funded by the Ministry of Justice (2020-2022) to run a project “Towards life without crime” for young people with a foreign background who have committed sexual offences.<sup>292</sup> The aim of the project was to prevent recidivism and provide therapeutic support and awareness-raising on concepts related to sexuality and gender.<sup>293</sup> According to the information provided by Finland towards the implementation of the European Child Guarantee,<sup>294</sup> there is insufficient help for children who commit violence and effective intervention is still lacking for peer-to-peer child violence.

## PROTECTION AND PROMOTION OF THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN VICTIMS OF SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND SEXUAL ABUSE

### *Reporting mechanisms*

Under the Finnish Child Protection Act, there is a duty for certain professions to report any circumstances that may endanger a child’s welfare or development to the police.<sup>295</sup> The list of professions bound by this reporting requirement is extensive, including teachers, health care professionals, social workers, religious communities and centres receiving victims of trafficking, among others.<sup>296</sup> The new public handbook on child crime investigation, as mentioned in the sections above, clarifies that these reporting requirements cover all sexual offences against children.<sup>297</sup> A child protection report must always be filed alongside the criminal report.<sup>298</sup> In addition to these obligations, the Criminal Code states that failure to report a serious crime, including child rape, sexual abuse of a child and child trafficking, constitutes an offence punishable with a fine or imprisonment up to six months.<sup>299</sup> It is worth reiterating here that this crime of failure to report only applies to the crimes specified and not to all sexual offences against children.

Finnish law does not explicitly preclude the reporting of crimes on an anonymous basis. However, guidance issued by the police states that where a person has the opportunity to report using another medium, police reports filed over the telephone will not be accepted since the police needs to be able to verify the identity of the person reporting.<sup>300</sup> As stated in the Criminal Code, only charges of sexual harassment of an adult or the unauthorised dissemination of a sexual image may not be initiated by the prosecutor unless the victim reports it or there is a very strong public interest in doing so.<sup>301</sup> Therefore, for all other sexual offences the prosecutor may initiate charges. Further, the Criminal Investigation Act (805/2011) states that if it is in public interest, a preliminary investigation shall be conducted on the request of the prosecutor.<sup>302</sup> Lastly, the law states that a preliminary investigation must be initiated when there is suspicion that a crime has been committed.<sup>303</sup>

Beyond reporting crimes to the police, there are several alternative avenues through

which children may seek advice and support. First, Save the Children Finland, in coordination with the Finnish Safer Internet Centre, operates the Finnish Hotline *Nettivistijä* that aims to prevent sexual abuse of children, promote early intervention and expedite the removal of child sexual abuse material from the Internet.<sup>304</sup> In 2021, the *Nettivistijä* hotline received 3,439 reports, an increase from 2,757 in 2020.<sup>305</sup> Of these, 35% involved child sexual abuse material or activity related to child sexual abuse, of which, 74% involved girls, 6% boys and 18% involved both.<sup>306</sup> Additionally, 88% of the child sexual abuse material involved children aged between three to 13 years.<sup>307</sup>

The year 2022 has been record-breaking for the hotline. Indeed, in 2022, the hotline had received 33,296 reports, ten times the numbers of previous years. Most of these reports contained material that requires downloading, which the hotline is not permitted to do by law. This means that the hotline is unable to process these reports as it would for other reports of suspected child sexual abuse material.<sup>308</sup>

In addition, the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare provides a free helpline *Lasten ja uorten puhelin* for children that addresses a range of issues, including advice and support in cases of sexual abuse or exploitation.<sup>309</sup> This involves help from healthcare professionals or psychologists.<sup>310</sup> According to the information provided by the Finnish authorities for the purpose of this report, the helpline received 143 reports regarding sexual harassment or violence in 2020 and 126 in 2021.

Regarding trafficking, the Assistance System for Victims of Trafficking runs a free helpline for victims of such crimes, including children.<sup>311</sup> Notably, the *Poikien Puhelin* service in Finland offers a helpline exclusively for boys and young men aged 20 or younger.<sup>312</sup> Whilst this service does not cater solely for issues relating to sexual abuse and

exploitation, boys with concerns relating to these issues can receive support and advice through this channel.<sup>313</sup>

A procedural guarantee related to reporting enjoyed by child victims of sexual abuse and exploitation is the special regime of the statute of limitation. These periods are prescribed by law and designate the maximum amount of time after a crime has been committed in which legal proceedings may be initiated against an offender. In Finland, generally these range from 20 years for the severest crimes with punishment of eight years or more, to two years for crimes punished by fines or up to one year imprisonment.<sup>314</sup> However, for certain sexual crimes against children such as child rape, child sexual abuse, human trafficking and exploitation of a child in prostitution, the limitation period will not expire until the victim turns 28 at the earliest.<sup>315</sup> Regarding grooming, the limitation period expires when the victim turns 23.<sup>316</sup> For crimes involving child sexual abuse material, there are no special provisions regarding limitation periods, thus for dissemination and possession the limitation period is five years and for aggravated dissemination is 10 years. When child victims of sexual exploitation do disclose their abuse, it is often delayed,<sup>317</sup> thus the existence of statutes of limitation have the potential to hinder their access to justice. Therefore, it is recommended that there are no statutory limitation periods for all offences concerning sexual exploitation of children, thereby allowing victims to come forward when they feel comfortable to do so.

### ***Investigations and child-friendly justice***

The Finnish legal framework has a range of provisions that contribute to ensuring child-friendly justice for child victims of sexual abuse and exploitation. First, the Criminal Investigation Act states that all persons under the age of 18 in preliminary investigations must be treated in accordance

with their age and development, ensuring that investigation measures do not cause unnecessary harm to a child at school, at work or in other environment important to them.<sup>318</sup> Further, to the extent possible, investigation measures directed at persons under the age of 18 shall be assigned to investigators particularly trained in this function.<sup>319</sup> In Finland, larger police departments are equipped with specialised staff with experience in dealing with crimes against children.<sup>320</sup> Specific training is organised annually at the Police University of Applied Sciences for police officers investigating crimes against children.<sup>321</sup>

Regarding the location of interviews, the same law provides that interviews must take place in special facilities designed for such purposes, specifically for victims deemed in need of special protection, such as child victims.<sup>322</sup> In addition, child victims of sexual offences may request to be interviewed by someone of the same gender.<sup>323</sup> Child victims aged under 15 have the right to have a guardian or legal representative present during the interview.<sup>324</sup> Interviews will be recorded for use as evidence in court proceedings.<sup>325</sup> For child victims aged under 15 and for child victims aged 15-17 in need of special protection this is automatic whilst for child victims of sexual offences aged 15-17, it will apply to those victims who do not want to be heard at the trial.<sup>326</sup> The police may interview a child by themselves or request assistance from child and adolescent forensic psychology or psychiatry units of university hospitals.<sup>327</sup> These interviews may take place in a child-friendly environment in the police department or in one of the five hospital units (located in Helsinki, Kuopio, Oulu, Tampere and Turku).<sup>328</sup> Whilst the police handbook on child crime investigation states that in urgent cases a child may be interviewed elsewhere, care must be taken not to cause damage to the child.<sup>329</sup>

In 2021, a university research study analysed the effects of interview training

and cooperation with forensic psychology units on police forensic interviews with child victims of sexual and physical abuse.<sup>330</sup> The study which comprised of 30 police participants, 23 of whom had received the interview training, indicated that taking part in training and cooperating with the forensic units improved the quality of interviews with children with the use of more facilitating and invitational questions, more active listening and less closed or suggestive questions.<sup>331</sup> This emphasises the positive effects such policies can have on child sensitive justice in Finland.

The legislation on criminal procedure states that the victim can benefit from the assistance of a qualified support person appointed by the court in cases concerning sexual offences, some serious violent crimes (whether justified with consideration to the relationship between the victim and the alleged perpetrator) or in cases concerning a crime against life, health or liberty (according to the seriousness of the crime, the personal circumstances of the victim and other circumstances).<sup>332</sup> In order to protect a witness or the victim, the court may allow them to be heard in the absence of another party or from behind a screen.<sup>333</sup> In addition, in certain circumstances the court may allow audio or visual recordings of pre-trial interviews to be used as evidence.<sup>334</sup> This applies to all children under 15, child victims aged 15-17 who are victims of sexual offences and do not want to be heard in the trial or are in need of special protection, or those victims who have reached 18 but are victims of sexual offences and testifying in court would endanger their health or cause other comparable significant harm.<sup>335</sup>

Although not specific to child victims of sexual abuse and exploitation, Finnish legislation provides a number of standards which may protect the privacy of such child victims.<sup>336</sup> First, the court can decide to keep secret the identity of a victim in a criminal case concerning particularly

sensitive aspects related to their private life.<sup>337</sup> Similarly, the trial documents can be kept secret since they contain sensitive information relating to the private life, health, disability or social welfare of a person.<sup>338</sup>

Long processing times have been recognised as a problem in criminal proceedings in Finland. In particular, child victims of sexual offences may have to relive their traumatic experiences for years because of the duration of the process. In 2021, university research, as part of the implementation of the Government Plan for Analysis, Assessment and Research, analysed the processing times of sexual offences targeting children and the factors determining their prolongation.<sup>339</sup> In December 2022, the Government of Finland passed a bill under which certain crimes against persons under the age of 18, including sexual offences and human trafficking offences, will be dealt with urgently, corresponding to the legislation already concerning suspects and accused persons under the age of 18.<sup>340</sup> The new legislation will enter into force in October 2023, with the aim to reduce the processing times of offences against children.

### ***Assistance to victims***

According to the Child Protection Act, child welfare institutions at the municipality level will be in charge of child protection and aftercare for children in need of protection.<sup>341</sup> Further, health centres and district hospitals must provide expert assistance for child protection, including examination, treatment and therapy services for the child.<sup>342</sup> The law obligates authorities to act in matter of urgency for services related to suspected sexual offences.<sup>343</sup> According to the Criminal Investigation Act, all victims must be informed of available support services, including but not limited to the right to legal assistance, right to a support person during proceedings, right to free legal aid, right to interpretation and translation of documents, the time and place of the court proceedings,

and a decision issued in a criminal case. Furthermore, a victim who reports a crime to the police has the right to receive a written confirmation of this report. The police must also inform the victim of any measures to be undertaken on the basis of the report of an offence or on the basis of an offence of which the criminal investigation authority has otherwise been informed, and of the victim's right to seek compensation and, as necessary, advise the victim on how to apply for compensation.<sup>344</sup> In addition, if the victim is in need of special protection, or if otherwise required by the nature of the offence or the personal circumstances of the victim, and if the victim consents, their contact information will be passed to the support service provider who will then reach out in due course.<sup>345</sup>

Since 2017, the Ministry of Justice gave the obligation to provide general support services for crime victims to Victim Support Finland for the period of 2018-2027.<sup>346</sup> Victim Support Finland provides inter alia legal advice, emotional support and can appoint a support person to help victims or witnesses of sexual crimes.<sup>347</sup> The organisation has a central office, seven regional offices and 31 service points around the country.<sup>348</sup> The services are also for children and young people and their guardians. Victim Support Finland provides comprehensive information in its webpage including a special section on children and young people as victims of crime.<sup>349</sup>

In terms of service provision, Finland has a network of 16 Seri Support Centres across the country that offer support to victims of sexual violence.<sup>350</sup> However, this support is only offered to those aged over 16, thereby precluding the majority of children from accessing the services.<sup>351</sup> In addition, as discussed previously, Finland began implementing the Barnahus model in 2019 to provide a multi-disciplinary approach to the recovery and reintegration of children.<sup>352</sup> These units are located in each of the five forensic hospital units

throughout the country and they operate through the interagency cooperation with various professionals from fields such as police, prosecution, health care, psychology and education.<sup>353</sup> Whilst the positive effects of Barnahus on both child-sensitive justice and access to adequate recovery and reintegration for child victims has been widely lauded, there is little information available on the progress of its implementation thus far in Finland. Lastly, for child victims of trafficking, support may be provided by the Assistance System for Victims of Trafficking.<sup>354</sup> Depending on whether the child has a registered municipality in Finland, the Assistance system may coordinate with local authorities and help cover expenses for additional services such as therapy or submit a child welfare report.<sup>355</sup>

### **Access to compensation**

The Finnish legislation does not have separate provisions for child victims of sexual abuse and exploitation to claim compensation. However, victims might have several avenues at their disposal to resort to. According to criminal procedure provisions, the victim may claim compensation in a judicial procedure connected to the ongoing criminal one.<sup>356</sup> In addition, the victim must be informed of their right to seek compensation and, if necessary, be guided in this process.<sup>357</sup> In fact, the prosecutor is obliged to pursue the civil claim when the victim requests it,<sup>358</sup> unless it causes essential inconvenience and the claim is clearly unfounded.<sup>359</sup> Whoever, deliberately or by accident caused injury or damages to another will be held liable for them,<sup>360</sup> including for personal injury and damage to property. When the injury or damage has been caused by an offence or in the exercise of public authority, or for other serious reasons, the economic loss not connected to personal injury or damage to property may be compensated. The victim is also entitled

to compensation for the suffering in relation to some offences.<sup>361</sup> Thus, under these provisions child victims of sexual crimes may pursue civil damages for the harm that they have faced.

In addition to the above, children may pursue compensation through State funds. Under Finnish legislation, compensation will be paid from State funds for damages caused by criminal offences,<sup>362</sup> including personal injury damages, suffering, property damage and financial loss. In addition, compensation can be paid if the crime resulted in the death of the victim and for legal expenses. Compensation for distress caused by a crime is paid to the victim of a sexual crime or deprivation of liberty, the victim of intended manslaughter, voluntary or involuntary murder, the victim of aggravated abuse and to the victim of any other crime comparable to these abovementioned crimes.<sup>363</sup> The maximum amount of compensation for personal injury damages and suffering is €51,000. Victims of sexual offences may be awarded €9,750 for distress, raised to a maximum of €16,500.<sup>364</sup> In general, funds are accessed by child victims of sexual abuse and exploitation. The State Treasury has a website, also available in English, where it is possible to apply for compensation electronically. The State Treasury requires evidence of the offence and the suffered damage, but it can acquire part of the evidence itself, too. In the case of sexual offences against children, compensation is paid from State funds. The maximum amount of compensation payable for mental suffering because of such offences is higher than for other offences (currently €15,000).<sup>365</sup> The other types of compensation and their maximum amounts correspond to those for other offences. To be compensated, the offence must be reported to the police, otherwise, it is only paid for a specific reason. If the offence is heard in court, the victim must demand compensation from the perpetrator.

# PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN AND SURVIVORS

In 2011, the Council of Europe published a policy review on child and youth participation in Finland based on consultations with children themselves, case studies and an online survey carried out with more than 700 child participants.<sup>366</sup> The results of the study showed that children felt their views were heard and taken seriously by those they had a personal relationship with but not with whom they had contacts with via activities at local or national level (teachers, youth workers or national councils).<sup>367</sup> As a comparison, in 2020, the Ministry of Justice carried out an assessment on the state of children's participation rights in Finland.<sup>368</sup> The results showed that, despite the effective legislation in place, shortcomings were identified such as vulnerable children, including those with disabilities, often being unaware of their rights, and it recommended that professionals should be given further training on various participatory methods which included all children.<sup>369</sup>

Furthermore, in Finland's 2022 report towards the implementation of the European Child Guarantee, child participation is considered disorganised and not included enough in all policy-making.<sup>370</sup> To this effect, Finland argues that the 2021 National Child Strategy will ensure that decisions are taken based on children's views, including those whose views are usually overlooked.<sup>371</sup> Similarly, children and young people's views were included in the development of the Lanzarote Implementation Plan, the Non-Violent Action Plan and the National Child Strategy.<sup>372</sup> In the Lanzarote Implementation

Plan in particular, young people's own perspective of surviving child sexual abuse and exploitation were included.<sup>373</sup>

Again, non-governmental organisations have played a key role in ensuring participation of children on matters related to their well-being and protection from sexual violence. Since 2001, Save the Children Finland has been conducting a "Children's Voice" survey to highlight the voices of children and to include these in the Finnish society.

Additional participatory projects and opportunities were organised by the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare, who, for example, created a website specially for young people where they can produce content, initiate debates on topics such as child sexual violence and are the administrators of the website's social media channels.<sup>374</sup> The International Better Internet for Kids Youth seminars were also organised by the Mannerheim League.<sup>375</sup> They provide young people with the opportunity to discuss their Internet experiences and online safety skills.<sup>376</sup>

Whilst the Lanzarote Implementation Plan did include young people's perspective on sexual abuse and exploitation, the active participation of child victims and survivors of child sexual abuse and exploitation in awareness-campaigns and on matters that directly affect them seems to be lacking. It is, however, worth noting that several non-governmental organisations use survivors' voices in their recommendations and/or work. For instance, the non-governmental

organisation *Suojellaan Lapsia* (Protect Children) founded the Our Voice survivors group for Finnish Survivors of child sexual abuse<sup>377</sup> and that in 2022, in collaboration with the members of the Our Voice Group, *Suojellaan Lapsia* (Protect Children) outlined the main goals for the 2023 Finnish Parliamentary elections.<sup>378</sup> These included,

for example, teaching children safety skills and strengthening offender-focused prevention of sexual violence against children.<sup>379,380</sup> Stronger collaboration with survivors should, as a result, be better recognised in order to build up knowledge and evidence as a means to benefit prevention policies and responses thereafter.

# WAY FORWARD

In Finland, information about sexual abuse and exploitation of children is gathered through various sources (self-reported surveys, police data, hotlines). While this method provides an overview on current and changing needs, it still poses a challenge to fully understand the scale and specificities that the different forms of child sexual abuse and exploitation may take. For example, the School Promotion Studies includes a section on “sexual harassment and violence”, yet sexual violence in the section on “violence in the family” is not included.<sup>381</sup> Considering

that offenders are usually known to the child, victims may face additional challenges to reporting their situation. It would be an added value for Finland to include, through for example the self-reported surveys, questions on sexual abuse and exploitation in the child’s circle of trust. In addition, conducting up-to-date and specific research on child sexual abuse, with a particular focus on the circle of trust and on children who are at an increased risk of sexual abuse would be beneficial.

## Relevant recommendations from the Lanzarote Committee:

- **Considers** that, if it has not yet done so, Finland should carry out awareness raising activities aiming at informing the public about the phenomenon of child sexual abuse in the circle of trust, with the intent to prevent it (R6).
- **Invites** Finland to establish a comprehensive system of reporting of cases of child sexual abuse committed in the circle of trust, which will ensure the completeness of the data collected (R18).
- **Invites** Finland to ensure ongoing evaluation of the effectiveness of their mechanisms or focal points with regard to their ability to depict the actual situation on the ground and produce accurate and reliable data (R21).

Throughout the report, it was also observed that different terminology regarding sexual abuse and sexual exploitation has been used by the authorities and professionals in various action plans, campaigns, and support services, often interchangeably. In addition, limited research was available on the prevalence of child sexual exploitation

with the offence often being linked to human trafficking. While their definitions may often overlap, Finnish authorities should standardise their differences and separate the related data to better design evidence-based policies aimed at addressing the needs of child victims, particularly those with disabilities or from a minority group.

Regarding the Finnish legal framework, there are a few shortfalls that leave gaps in the protection of children from sexual abuse and exploitation. Adopting definitions of exploitation of children in prostitution and child sexual abuse material would provide clarity and in turn better safeguard children against such crimes. The legislation should be amended to ensure that the crime of solicitation of children for sexual purposes covers instances in which the sexual abuse

has occurred only online. In addition, criminalising the crimes of sale of children, live streaming of child sexual abuse and sexual extortion would all provide further legislative protection for children. Lastly, the Finnish legislation should be amended to remove the double criminality requirement in extraterritorial application and extradition in cases involving sexual crimes against children.

### Relevant recommendations from the Lanzarote Committee:

- **Urges** Finland to take the necessary legislative or other measures to set up or designate mechanisms for data collection or focal points at national or local level and in collaboration with civil society, for the purpose of observing and evaluating in terms of quantitative data collection the phenomenon of the sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children in general and child sexual abuse committed in the circle of trust, in particular (R13).
- **Considers** that Finland should put in place effective mechanisms for data collection with a specific focus on children affected by the refugee crisis who are victims or presumed victims of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse and review the possible removal of obstacles to the collection of such data, in particular, where they exist, legal restrictions to do so, with due respect for the requirements of personal data protection (R7).

An additional consequence of the various terminology applied is the impact it may have on identifying victims. As mentioned, many child victims of sexual exploitation are usually supported through the human trafficking National Assistance System, making the identification of sexual violence dependent on the effective training provided

to professionals who are in regular contact with children. However, the rise in migration coupled with limited regular training on the specificities of child sexual exploitation has brought new challenges to the Finnish authorities, resulting in low identification of victims.<sup>382</sup>

### Relevant recommendations from the Lanzarote Committee:

- **Invites** Finland to ensure that all staff responsible for interviewing child victims have undergone suitable qualifying training (R42).
- **Invites** Finland to inform all children, in a child friendly manner, of their rights as children, including the types of alternative care offered to them, in order to prevent children from being declared as adults and to protect them from the inherent risks of being considered as adults (R3).
- **Invites** Finland to train and raise awareness of those in contact with children affected by the refugee crisis on the detection, reporting and referral of signs of sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children. Such training should include modules addressing the contextual specificities of these children's experiences (R10).

Furthermore, within the child-friendly legal response model of the Barnahus, the Finnish authorities provide for potential and recognised child victims, a series of guarantees such as preventing re-traumatisation, providing support including medical and therapeutic assistance, and

assessing the child's and their family's future needs.<sup>383</sup> It is paramount that this recognised investigative model is centralised throughout Finland, in order to provide the same support to all child victims, especially those with disabilities, from minority groups or living in rural areas and Sámi territories.

### Relevant recommendations from the Lanzarote Committee:

- **Considers** that information and advice should be provided to child victims in a manner adapted to their age and maturity, in a language they understand, and which is gender and culturally sensitive (R23).
- **Invites** Finland to arrange the interview of the child victim in a child friendly setting separate from the usual premises where investigations and interviews are conducted (such as police, hospital, or court premises), by taking into consideration the best practices in this field, and to provide such settings throughout its territory (R41).

Finally, Finland has recently initiated important and comprehensive action plans to prevent all forms of violence against children, including the Lanzarote Action Plan. Nevertheless, it is essential that the authorities ensure proper funding and implementation of the plans, especially those containing objectives related to the prevention of sexual abuse and exploitation of children. Lastly, the participation of

children and survivors in matters which concern them should be secured and strengthened. Funding, for example, of evidence-based material made for and by children on online sexual abuse and exploitation could help young people who find themselves in situations where they have produced self-generated content to seek support from professionals, if necessary.

### Relevant recommendations from the Lanzarote Committee:

- The Lanzarote Committee invites all Parties to encourage the participation of children, according to their evolving capacity, in the development and the implementation of state policies, programmes or other initiatives concerning the fight against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children, including when facilitated by information and communication technologies and as regards child self-generated sexual images and/or videos, and to provide example(s) of how children's views are taken into account in the context of the participation of children (Recommendation VII-6 6).

# ENDNOTES

1. The [Lanzarote Committee](#) is the body established to monitor whether the Lanzarote Convention is effectively implemented by its Parties (i.e. the countries having ratified/acceded to it). It is composed of representatives of the Parties to the Convention as well as representatives of international governmental and non-governmental organisations active in combating child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse.
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3. Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (n.d.). [The special status of the Åland Islands](#).
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45. *Ibid.*
46. *Ibid.*
47. Council of Europe (2005, May). [Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings](#). Article 4 (a).
48. *Ibid.*, Article 4 (b).
49. UN General Assembly (2000, May). [Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography](#). Article 2(b).
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- child (e.g., sale of children for illegal adoption). Therefore, 'sale of children' is not necessarily related to sexual abuse and sexual or other forms of exploitation. Lastly, the 'sale of children' can take place without physically moving the child out of his/her social environment, whereas trafficking inherently depends on the movement of the child. Interagency Working Group on the Protection of Children (2016, January). *Terminology Guidelines for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse*. 58.
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  61. *Ibid.*
  62. *Ibid.*
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  69. *Ibid.*
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  81. *EU Kids Online*.
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  83. *Ibid.*
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  86. *Ibid.*
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  89. *Ibid.*
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  91. ECPAT International & UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti (2022). *Children's Disclosures of Online Sexual Exploitation and Abuse. Disrupting Harm Data Insight 2*. Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children. The study which collected evidence from 13 different countries, revealed that children who experienced online sexual exploitation and abuse chose to disclose to their friends and siblings first and not professionals, assuming they would face judgment and blame from the latter.
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  105. *Ibid.*
  106. Council of Europe (2022, March). *Implementation report on the Protection of Children Against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse Facilitated by Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) Addressing the Challenges Raised By Child Self-Generated Sexual Images and/or Videos*.
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137. *Ibid.*
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146. *Ibid.*
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- in producing materials. In Finnish: *Toimintasuunnitelma covid-19 – epidemian hillinnan hybridistrategian toteuttamiseen*.
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171. *Ibid.*, 136.
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173. Government of Finland (2013). *Child Welfare Act*. Section 6.
174. Government of Finland (1929). *Marriage Act*. Chapter 2 Section 4.
175. Ministry of Justice (2017). *Explanation: Forced marriages are also a reality in Finland, the training and cooperation of the authorities must be strengthened*.
176. Council of Europe (2011) *Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence*. Article 37.
177. Government of Finland (1889). *Criminal Code*. Chapter 20 Section 12.
178. *Ibid.*
179. *Ibid.*
180. These aggravating factors include: the use of serious violence, of infliction of serious illness or injury, when the crime is committed by more than one offender, the crime causes particularly notable suffering, the crime is committed in a particularly brutal or cruel manner, the target is a child to whom the crime is likely to cause special damage due to the child’s age or developmental level or the offender is in a position of special trust to the child. *Ibid.*, Government of Finland (1889). *Criminal Code*. Chapter 20 Section 13.
181. Such as illness, disability, state of fear, unconsciousness or intoxication Government of Finland. *Criminal Code* (1889) in force until January 2023.
182. Amnesty International (2020). *Criminalization and Prosecution of Rape in Finland Submission to the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, Its Causes and Consequences*. 4.
183. Government of Finland (1889). *Criminal Code*. Chapter 20 Section 5.
184. *Ibid.* For this reason the offence of sexual abuse can very seldom apply to sexual offences against children under 16, as such offences are punishable more severely elsewhere in the criminal law.
185. While the *official translation into English* of the criminal code amendments refers to “sexual assault”, the term “sexual abuse” will be used throughout this Country Overview, in line with the provisions of the Lanzarote Convention.
186. *Ibid.*, Chapter 20 Section 14.
187. These aggravating factors are largely the same as those listed for child rape. The only difference being that, due to the wide scope of the provision and possible variance of the offences, the crime committed by more than one offender is an aggravating factor for sexual abuse of a child only if the offence causes particularly grave mental or physical suffering or is committed in a particularly humiliating manner. *Ibid.*, Chapter 20 Section 15 point 2.
188. *Ibid.*, Chapter 20 Section 13.
189. *Ibid.*, Chapter 20 Section 4.
190. *Ibid.*, Chapter 20 Section 17.
191. *Ibid.*
192. Information provided by Save the Children Finland.
193. Government of Finland (1889). *Criminal Code*. Chapter 20 Section 16.
194. A person’s participation in sexual intercourse shall not be considered voluntary if:
- 1) they have not verbally, by their behaviour or in any other way expressed that they participate in it voluntarily;
  - 2) they have been forced into sexual intercourse using violence against the person or threats; or
  - 3) they have not been able to form or express their will due to ignorance, illness, disability, state of fear, strong state of intoxication, impaired state of consciousness, suddenness of the situation, serious abuse of a special position of power or other comparable reason.
195. Government of Finland (1889). *Criminal Code*. Chapter 20 Section 1.
196. *Ibid.*, Chapter 20 Section 2.
197. *Ibid.*, Chapter 20 Section 2.
198. Amnesty International (2020). *Criminalization and Prosecution of Rape in Finland Submission to the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, Its Causes and Consequences*. 4.
199. *Ibid.*
200. *Ibid.*
201. ECPAT International (2020). *Summary Paper on Sexual Exploitation of Children in Prostitution*. Bangkok: ECPAT International.
202. Government of Finland (1889). *Criminal Code*. Chapter 20 Section 9.
203. *Ibid.*, Chapter 20 Section 5, 6, 9 and 12-16.
204. *Ibid.*, Chapter 20 Section 1-5.
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206. UN General Assembly (2000, May 25). *Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography*. (A/RES/54/263). Article 2.
207. Government of Finland (1889). *Criminal Code*. Chapter 25, Section 3.
208. *Ibid.*, Chapter 25 Section 3(a).
209. United Nations General Assembly (2000). *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime*.

210. Government of Finland (1889). *Criminal Code*. Chapter 1 Section 7.
211. ECPAT International (2020). *Summary Paper Sale and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes*, Bangkok: ECPAT International.
212. As referred in Chapter 20, Section 10, Subsection 1 of the Finnish Criminal Code.
213. UN General Assembly. (2000, May 25). *Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. (A/RES/54/263)*.
214. Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2019). *Guidelines regarding the implementation of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography*. Paragraph 49.
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The joint Council of Europe and ECPAT International Country Overviews gather the monitoring findings and recommendations of the Lanzarote Committee, existing research and publicly available data about sexual exploitation and abuse of children in parties to the Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (Lanzarote Convention). National regulatory frameworks are analysed and presented in light of the standards of the Lanzarote Convention. The joint Country Overviews also present achievements and challenges in the implementation of the Lanzarote Convention, and highlight ways forward to improve the protection of children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse.

Finland ratified the Lanzarote Convention on 9 June 2011 and it entered into force in its respect on 1 October 2011. Many actions against the sexual abuse and exploitation of children have been taken in Finland, including the Non-Violent Childhoods: Action Plan for the Prevention of Violence against Children (2020-2025) and the first National Action Plan for the Lanzarote Convention (2022–2025). Sexuality education is part of the national core curriculum and other important efforts and steps in preventing child sexual abuse have also been launched, including from the perspective of supporting persons with a paedophilic interest. Further steps can be taken to improve the protection of children in Finland including a mechanism for centralising all relevant data on child sexual abuse and exploitation and continuing to enhance legislation, policies and measures to fight against sexual abuse and exploitation facilitated by information and communication technologies.

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ECPAT International is a global network of civil society organisations working to eradicate all forms of sexual exploitation of children. Over the past 30+ years, ECPAT has become the forefront international network of non-governmental organisations dedicated to end this severe form of violence against children, advocating for States' accountability and more robust measures across sectors to enhance the protection of children. ECPAT currently has over 120 member organizations operating in over 100 countries around the world.

[www.ecpat.org](http://www.ecpat.org)

The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 46 member states, including all members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.

[www.coe.int](http://www.coe.int)

