

Trafficking in the Digital Era



collaboration

2021

Conference report



**Children
at Risk**



Conference Report

Trafficking in the Digital Era

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Contents

About the event.....	4
Biographies.....	5
Speakers.....	5
Moderators.....	9
Summary of Presentations.....	11
Opening.....	11
Words of Welcome – Minister Agnè Bilotaité.....	11
Keynote Address – Commissioner Ylva Johansson.....	11
Trafficking in Children – Executive Secretary Petya Nestorova.....	12
Current Trends and Development – Cathal Delaney.....	14
Reflections from the Council of Europe Conference on Trafficking in Human Beings – Helga Gayer.....	16
Youth Panel.....	18
Thea Myhr.....	18
Egle Puidokaite.....	18
Lelde Varca.....	19
Linda Nieminen.....	19
Child Victims of Trafficking – Who are they?.....	20
Who are the victims and how are they recruited online? – Julia Muraszekwicz.....	20
Self-generated images – Linda Jonsson.....	21
Impact of trafficking on children – Ethel Quayle.....	22
Identification, Justice and Recovery.....	23
Operation Relapse: Identification and investigation – Jörgen Lindeberg.....	23
Supporting child protection stakeholders in the prevention of recruitment of children into CSE and human trafficking online – Maia Rusakova and Vladlena Avdeeva.....	24

Enabling a multidisciplinary response, the role of the Barnahus Model – Nadine Finch.....	25
Country Case Example – Lithuania – Lolita Plančiūnaitė-Vaičiulienė.....	27
Youth panel.....	28
Egle Puidokaite.....	28
Thea Myhr.....	29
Lilde Varda	29
Linda Niemenen.....	30
Closing remarks.....	30
Grzegorz Poznanski – Director General, CBSS.....	30

This report summarises presentations made at a conference hosted by the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS). The CBSS does not make any warranties with respect to the accuracy or completeness of the information provided by the speakers in their respective presentations. The views, findings, interpretations and conclusions expressed in the presentations, summarized in this report, are those of the speakers and do not necessarily represent the official position of the CBSS.

About the event

On May 6th, 2021, an online conference on 'Trafficking in the Digital Era' was held, gathering over 200 participants from across the Baltic Sea region and the EU. The conference was organised as a collaboration between the Council of the Baltic Sea States Expert Group on Children at Risk and the Task Force against Trafficking in Human Beings, under the auspices of the Lithuanian CBSS Presidency.

The purpose of the conference was to highlight how technology facilitates child trafficking, who the victims are, and the impact it has on them. Further, the objective was to learn more about identification, investigation, safe paths to recovery and justice for children. In addition, in an ongoing CBSS effort to involve young people in all aspects of decision-making and problem-solving in the Baltic Sea Region, a youth panel shared their perspectives to conference.

The perpetrators behind trafficking in human beings rapidly adapt their modus operandi and have increased their use of information and communication technologies. Recruiting victims through the Internet via social media and apps, advertising hubs, dating sites and other online platforms and websites is a rapidly growing trend.

The contributors shared recommendations and insights into how we can improve the detection and identification of children subjected to trafficking in human beings, in particular those recruited and exploited online also their exploitation by dysfunctional families. They shared different challenges and innovative ways to overcome them. Speakers underscored the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on human trafficking, in particular increased vulnerability and exploitation online. The conference also introduced effective tools for investigating human trafficking offences while respecting and protecting the rights of child victims.

A key message was that the development of innovative technology, capacity building on cyber-crime and e-evidence are crucial in response to trafficking in human beings, as is digital co-operation with the private sector. The importance of interagency and multidisciplinary efforts to safeguard victims' rights cannot be over-emphasised. Social services' support and co-operation at both local and international level needs to be developed further to offer a protected environment for the child.

Biographies

Speakers

Agnė Bilotaitė

Ms Bilotaitė is a Lithuanian politician from the [Homeland Union – Lithuanian Christian Democrats](#) group and has been member of the [Seimas](#) since 2008. She was appointed [Minister of the Interior](#) in the [Šimonytė Cabinet](#) in 2020. In 2006, Bilotaitė became the manager of [Homeland Union's](#) Western Division and was elected to the [Tenth Seimas of Lithuania](#) in 2008. She was member of the Nuclear Energy Commission and deputy chief of the Anti-Corruption Commission of the parliament. During her second term in the Eleventh Seimas, she served on Committees for Environment Protection and State Administration and Local Authorities. After winning the [2016 Lithuanian parliamentary election](#), Bilotaitė began her third term in Seimas. She is the deputy chair of Homeland Union – Lithuanian Christian Democrat Political Group in the parliament and a member of Committee on Audit and Anti-Corruption Commission.

Ylva Johansson

Ms Ylva Johansson was appointed European Commissioner for Home Affairs in December 2019. In Sweden, she was Minister for Employment in the Swedish Government from 2014 to 2019, Minister for Welfare and Elderly Healthcare from 2004 to 2006 and Minister for Schools from 1994 to 1998. Ms. Johansson was educated at Lund University and the Stockholm Institute of Education.

Petya Nestorova

Since 2010, Ms. Nestorova has been responsible for the Council of Europe's activities in combating human trafficking. She oversees all monitoring of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, including country visits, preparation of reports and recommendations, and follow-up on their implementation. She also manages the organisation of activities to promote the Council of Europe's standards on combating human trafficking, in close collaboration with public officials, civil society and other intergovernmental organisations. Ms. Nestorova holds Master's

degrees in international Economic Relations and Comparative European Studies, as well as a D.Phil from the University of Sussex, UK.

Cathal Delaney

Cathal Delaney leads the analysis project AP Twins - the team countering online child exploitation - within the European Cyber Crime Centre at Europol. He represents Europol in EMPACT Cyber CSE, on the NCMEC Board of Management Law Enforcement Committee, at the Board of Management of the Virtual Global Taskforce and is Chair of the European Financial Coalition. He has long experience in this area of law enforcement and his specific focus is on making online environments safer for children.

Julia Muraszkwicz

Dr. Julia Muraszkwicz is Practice Manager at Trilateral Research. She combines socio-technical capabilities and research skills to leverage insights and make sense of complex problems. Her domain expertise includes human trafficking, criminal law, human security, ethics and human rights. She enjoys defining, conceptualising, and empirically studying problems to find innovative remedies, including their relationship with innovations such as AI. She has delivered training workshops to the military, police, border force, airport staff, civil servants, civil society, faith groups and students. She also teaches a course on Comparative Constitutional Law at the University of Amsterdam's Politics, Psychology, Law and Economics College.

Linda Jonsson

Linda Jonsson is the Competence Centre Co-ordinator for PROMISE at CBSS. She holds a first degree in social sciences and a PhD in child psychiatry and is an Associated Professor at Ersta Sköndal Bräcke University in Sweden. Her responsibilities also include issues related to sexual abuse at Barnafriid, the Swedish national competence centre against child abuse. She is a nationally recognised expert in her field and her research focuses on different kinds of child abuse, especially sexual exploitation and online sexual abuse.

Ethel Quayle

Ethel Quayle is Professor of Forensic Clinical Psychology in the School of Health in Social Science at the University of Edinburgh and Director of COPINE – a rating system used in the UK to categorise the severity of images of child sex abuse. A clinical psychologist, she has worked with both sex offenders and their victims. For over 20 years she has researched technology-mediated crimes against children, collaborating internationally with government and non-government agencies in the context of research, policy and practice. She plays an active role in a number of government and non-governmental organisations.

Helga Gayer

Since 2017, Helga Gayer has been an elected member of the Council of Europe Expert Group GRETA (Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings), becoming President in March 2021.

GRETA comprises 15 members with different professional backgrounds, who are elected for a four-year term. Its task is to evaluate the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention against Trafficking in Human Beings by the Parties (States which signed the convention) through a monitoring procedure. Helga Gayer has worked with the German Federal Criminal Police (BKA) since 1992 and has been actively engaged in combating trafficking since 2006.

Jörgen Lindeberg

Jörgen Lindeberg has been a policeman for 43 years and is currently a Detective Inspector for the Swedish Police at the National Operations Department and is responsible for investigating international sexual exploitation of children. The cases he investigates concern suspected exploitation where the victim lives outside Sweden and the perpetrators are of Swedish nationality or are residing in Sweden. At one time, most of his cases concerned travelling sex offenders but now they focus on "web-cam shows" of sexual abuse of children. He has been working in this field since 1998.

Maia Rusakova

Dr Maia Rusakova is the director and co-founder of the Regional Public Organization “Stellit” (St. Petersburg, Russia). She is ECPAT International Board Representative for Eastern Europe and Central Asia. She co-founded the Russian Alliance against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in 2004, which later became an ECPAT Affiliate group in Russia (2005). Since 2020 she is acting vice-president of ECPAT. She is an associate professor in the Department of Sociology at Saint Petersburg State University and head of the Centre for Monitoring Education Quality, Resource Centre “Centre for Sociological and Internet Research”, Sociological Clinic for Applied Research there. She has headed the Scientific Centre of Sociology of Childhood at the Sociological Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences since 2014. Her expertise includes combating human trafficking, child sexual abuse and exploitation, public health, sociology of childhood and prevention of HIV. In 2017 she was honoured by the Baltic Sea Counter-Trafficking Award.

Vladlena Avdeeva

Vladlena Avdeeva is a project manager at the Social Research department of the Regional Public Organization “Stellit” (St. Petersburg, Russia). Since 2017 she has coordinated inter-regional and international research projects targeted at combating human trafficking, child sexual abuse and exploitation in co-operation with NGOs, state child welfare organisations and international organisations such as ECPAT International, OSCE and IOM. Since 2020, she has been a sociologist at the Centre for Monitoring Education Quality at Saint-Petersburg State University.

Nadine Finch

Nadine Finch is an Honorary Senior Policy Fellow in the School for Policy Studies at the University of Bristol and attached to Migration Mobilities, Bristol. She is also an associate at CHILD CIRCLE, a centre of expertise and public interest action on child protection in Europe. Previously, she was a human rights barrister specialising in children’s rights, migration, child trafficking and international family law. She has published work for UNICEF, UNHCR, OHCHR, the Harvard University Committee on Human Rights and the European Commission, amongst others. Her work covers migration, child trafficking, criminal justice and human rights law. She was also previously an immigration judge and remains an active member of a group of IARMJ judges.

Lolita Plančiūnaitė-Vaičiulienė

Lolita Plančiūnaitė-Vaičiulienė is Chief Investigator of the Lithuanian Criminal Police Bureau, having ten years' experience in conducting pre-trial investigations into the sexual exploitation of children and trafficking in human beings. She is now working in the field of co-ordination and control of pre-trial investigations related to crimes of child sexual abuse and human trafficking.

Grzegorz Marek Poznanski

Grzegorz Poznański has worked in multilateral diplomacy and international security including in the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Poland to the United Nations Office in Geneva and Export Policy Department, UN Political Affairs Department and Security Policy Department as a Deputy Director and Director. From 2008–2010 he was the Director of the Bureau of Diplomatic Security. In 2010, he was appointed as the Ambassador of the Republic of Poland to Estonia. Since 2014, he served at the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs as Deputy Director of the European Policy Department (responsible for relations with Nordic, Baltic and V4 states and regional co-operation), Director of the Security Policy Department and Adviser at the Bureau of the Director General. From 2017–2020, he was Deputy Ambassador at the Polish Embassy to Lithuania. Since 2020 he serves as Director General of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) Permanent International Secretariat in Stockholm.

Moderators

Ms Olivia Lind Haldorsson

Ms Olivia Lind Haldorsson is a children's rights advocate who has been working in the field of children's rights and child protection for more than 20 years. In 2014, she co-founded 'Child Circle', a Brussels-based NGO focusing on strengthening national child protection systems. She is President of the Promise Barnahus Network, which promotes the establishment of Barnahus in Europe. She has authored the Barnahus Quality Standards publication and other practical tools in support and is an experienced independent expert on strategic advocacy initiatives. Previously, she worked with Save the Children International EU Office. She is currently Senior Adviser and Head of the Children at Risk Unit at the Council of the Baltic Sea States Secretariat. (childrenatrisk.cbss.org).

Ms Vineta Polatside

Ms Vineta Polatside is Senior Adviser for Safe and Secure Region Priority at the Council of the Baltic Sea States Secretariat. Her main areas of expertise include trafficking in human beings, migration and integration of migrants. She has been working in counter trafficking field in different capacities since 2003. Previously she worked in the International Organization for Migration and Secretariat of the Special Assignment Minister for Social Integration and implemented various national and transnational projects in the fields of trafficking in human beings, migration management and integration of migrants.

Summary of Presentations

Opening

Words of Welcome – Minister Agn  Bilotait 

Ms Bilotait  opened the conference with a firm statement that trafficking in human beings is a crime and a violation of human rights. Traffickers are exploitative, treating men, women, and children as commodities, mercilessly exploiting the defenceless for profit. It should be seen as fracturing human dignity with illicit profit of billions of euros.

The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic confirms that trafficking in human beings is adaptable to circumstances; it has shifted online. On the one hand, the digital space has become one of the main means of communication for children whilst on the other, it has become more dangerous for them since they are easy targets for traffickers hence are at higher risk. In the face of such threats appropriate safeguarding response is essential. Enhanced regional collaboration raises awareness and provides victim support.

Ms. Bilotait  concluded by saying that the conference will shed light on the darkest corners of the growing problems of online exploitation and human trafficking. It will generate knowledge and foster reflections that experts, parents, and other adults can build on and take forward to protect children and youth.

Keynote Address – Commissioner Ylva Johansson

Ylva Johansson opened her keynote address with a compelling and still relevant reminder of the 2002 film "Lilya 4-ever" based on a true story about a young Lithuanian girl who is persuaded by her boyfriend to move to Sweden. On arrival, she is met by a pimp who takes her to an empty apartment, where he imprisons and rapes her. She is then forced to perform multiple sexual acts.

Trafficking in Human Beings is an organised, often violent crime on a transnational scale and is one of society's biggest threats. The latest quadrennial Europol report showed that organised crime in Europe has become more professional and international. This is a growing trend and a huge cross-border threat.

Worldwide, trafficking generates nearly 30 Bn euros, being a low risk and high profit crime. In Europe, traffickers make 40 Mn euros by selling the bodies of women and girls.

Currently, only 3% of proceeds gained from the trafficking activities are confiscated or frozen. Ms. Johansson recently presented a strategy on how to tackle organised crime and how to fight criminal networks, including trafficking. She highlighted the importance of boosting police co-operation by improving information exchange, updating Europol's mandate, and creating a new EU police co-operation code. This strategy will also address new digital realities by improving transnational access to electronic evidence as well as improved procedures for data retention, ensuring digital evidence is not lost.

Ms. Johansson outlined a separate strategy aimed at both prevention and conviction, thus protecting and empowering victims by supporting focus groups for specialised prosecutors. EU member states should be encouraged to conduct joint inspections supported, where possible, by Europol and by the new European labour authority.

In the last 10 years, there has been an exponential increase of child sexual abuse material online. In Europe alone last year there was an increase in reporting from 23,000 to one million. Ms. Johansson therefore welcomed support from the European Parliament and the Council for her emergency legislation that will persuade internet companies to continue to voluntarily report child sexual abuse online. She will also present permanent legislation that will make reporting mandatory.

She concluded her presentation by expressing gratitude to those who work on the ground, reinforcing her strong commitment to support police co-operation, the work of prosecutors and experts, together with developing new European legislation.

Ms Ylva Johansson's full presentation can be found here

https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/2019-2024/johansson/announcements/commissioner-johanssons-speech-council-baltic-sea-states-conference-trafficking-digital-era_en

Trafficking in Children - Executive Secretary Petya Nestorova

Ms Nestorova began her presentation with a focus on today's digital age and our increased use of technology. Despite its advantages, advancing technology in the digital age has facilitated the illegal behaviour of human traffickers.

She illustrated this by citing the case of a 44-year-old man from the Philippines who hired a 19-year-old woman as a domestic worker. The woman was forced to live stream sexual acts and sell her body to his customers and himself. Eventually the woman escaped and

reported the man to the police. The perpetrator was imprisoned for life for multiple counts of human trafficking, cyber-crime, and rape; additionally, he had to pay his victim a considerable sum in compensation.

The CoE is actively engaged in combating trafficking in human beings in its 47 member states. The CoE Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings provides comprehensive and multidisciplinary legal frameworks to confront the problem with provisions addressing protection, prevention, prosecution, and partnerships. A child-centred approach requires state actors to support child victims, to create a protective environment and to reduce vulnerability to traffickers.

The Convention is monitored by the Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA) and has shown that state parties have reported an increased use of information and communication technologies to commit human trafficking offences. They have also reported on the difficulties of investigating and prosecuting offences facilitated by such technologies.

Victims are recruited through social media platforms, with traffickers taking advantage of publicly available personal information and the anonymity of digital spaces to contact victims. The traffickers also exploit the digital space using advertisement, online live streaming as well as to monitor and maintain their victims and their criminal networks. The pattern of exploitation of human trafficking has morphed into digital platforms and it's a growing issue that needs to be tackled, especially during the current Covid-19 pandemic.

Ms Nestorova reprised the previous speaker's statistics and added that their data was broadly in line with the numbers observed by GRETA, further noting that over a period of 15 years, the number of child victims has tripled. The different statistics for men and women were noted.

Many believe there is a socio-economic component, the sale of children is a survival strategy used by the poorest to survive. She emphasised that there are many other factors other than those specific to low-income countries that should be included in considerations of how socio-economic backgrounds impact trafficking in human beings. Children's vulnerability to these crimes is very often conditioned by the threat of domestic violence, poverty, discrimination amongst ethnic minorities and so on. Traffickers exploit this by creating a sense of belonging and building trust with the child-victims.

Trafficking in human beings takes many forms; a growing trend is cyber trafficking. The most prevalent form is sexual exploitation, video applications, labour trafficking and trafficking for illegal adoptions. It is also important to remember that there are two groups of cyber-traffickers. The first are hunters, who actively search for the vulnerable using social media. They target, select, and then deceive their victims. The second are fishers. They 'fish' by posting advertisements, then wait for victims to contact them.

To cope with these growing trends, it is important to increase international collaboration. The CoE has recently issued guidelines to promote respect and protect victims in the digital environment. It has signed agreements with most leading tech companies, aiming to strengthen collaboration with big tech such as Apple, Microsoft and so on.

Ms. Nestorova ended her presentation by emphasising the importance of governments and the private sector working closely together to generate respect for human rights and the rule of law in the digital environment. She also noted that it is important to continue to raise awareness of children, parents, educators, and other professionals. She asserted that we need to look beyond law enforcement so that we can make the best use of available tools and technologies and use them to *our* advantage.

Current Trends and Development – Cathal Delaney

Mr. Cathal Delaney described different forms of human trafficking and current trends. One of the growing trends seen today is live streaming. Live streaming is described as 'distant child abuse' and the offender is usually from a more developed country than the victim. The perpetrator is basically sending money to recruit someone from a less well-off country, sometimes within the EU but more often in low-income countries such as the Philippines. Child victims are abused according to the instructions that the payer is requesting, in fact, abuse by proxy.

As this trend is growing, it is increasingly important to determine the relationship between online abuse and human trafficking – a rather subtle boundary. Europol is making progress with payment providers and banks by detecting criminal financial transfers. This is a growing trend, but detection is not easy.

Another major trend is the dramatic increase of self-generated material. This is a difficult and sensitive topic since it can apply to a wide range of victim behaviour. The victim

might have been forced to generate the material, perhaps through threat of blackmail, they may be being groomed or simply be seeking attention.

Dark net activities have also increased and evolved over time; it being inaccessible to regular browsers. Many of the environments investigated by Europol use the 'Tor' browser which can create dark spaces for people with a sexual interest in children to interact with others without much risk of detection. He described such spaces as an echo chamber since the dark net validates these people in their belief that it is reasonable that children should be sexually exploited and abused by giving them access to specific material and by letting them connect with others that share their beliefs.

What we have seen in the dark net, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic, was that offenders were opening new spaces to cater for particular illegal needs and interests. For example, there were offenders who opened new spaces related to "capping" or victim blaming.

Peer-to-peer activity is also an increasing problem. Europol noticed a definite spike involving vulnerable children during the first lockdown in 2020. Another increasing trend is anonymisation. This is where offenders use VPNs, proxies, and encrypted apps to communicate with one another and to share child sexual material without revealing personally identifiable information.

Mr Delaney referred to another trend, which is a growing interest among child sex offenders in "child sex dolls". This is a disturbing since these dolls are anatomically similar to children. Furthermore, coercion and extortion usually rely on children being compromised by having provided an intimate image of themselves. In the future, indeed it has already happened in some cases, is that it's possible to produce deep fake images and videos of children who would never have created or distributed intimate videos of themselves. These can now be used to coerce and extort. We should already be educating children about these dangers and how to avoid them.

In 2017, Europol had a successful "Say No Campaign" against sexual exploitation of children, producing multilingual videos and material that was easily adapted to national contexts. Some member states incorporated these videos and material into their educational curricula.

In 2021, another campaign will be launched, focusing on how adults can intervene, how children can protect themselves and how important it is to dialogue openly about children's activities online, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic.

He concluded with a final statement about the blurred line between human trafficking and sexual exploitation. The reality is not about whether a child is trafficked or sexually abused online, the fact and what really matters is that if a child is endangered, the child should be removed from harm. We must work closely together and not divide human trafficking with sexual exploitation from each other but rather collaborate to protect children.

Reflections from the Council of Europe Conference on Trafficking in Human Beings – Helga Gayer

Ms Gayer presented an overview of a project, led by the German Federal Criminal Police Office which involves police departments of seven German federal states as well as the Austrian federal criminal police. Its goal is to fight trafficking and exploitation of children and young people up to the age of 21 through a multidisciplinary approach combining knowledge from different sectors to raise awareness of the characteristics of child trafficking and to promote a common approach. Three main strands present themselves, as follows:

- Exploitation of children and young persons through the internet: This covers the recruitment of young victims through the Internet and how it is advertised and carried out. It also covers the role of the dark net in relation to sexual exploitation of children, the needs and opportunities emerging during investigative procedures and how to best tap into online prevention to keep children and young people safe. The Covid-19 pandemic has caused a significant increase in online child sexual abuse and exploitation which makes this topic even more important.
- Exploitation of children and young persons by families: Many children are trafficked by members of their own families or communities. Besides trafficking for sexual exploitation purposes, the project covers exploitation through forced begging and commission of crime.
- Strengthening child and young person's testimonies: One of the main challenges in investigating human trafficking offences is the collection of testimonial evidence from victims. In many countries, an investigative procedure is dependent on the victims'

readiness to come forward and testify. The trafficked victims' statement is necessary as proof.

Since the start of the project in July 2018, progress has been made, as follows:

- Several networking events and conferences with relevant actors were organised between police, prosecutors, youth officers, internet related private companies and NGOs. A checklist for frontline officers of how to deal with trafficking in human beings was developed to identify victims of exploitation. It has been disseminated throughout Germany.
- A strategy for how police investigate Internet crime in this area was developed. A presentation of the "Lover-boy" or "Romeo pimps" method was produced and published on social media - it reached more than 410 000 people within the first week.
- 22 investigative procedures have been supported financially with analysis and international co-ordination. A total of 31 suspects have been identified in these proceedings. In addition, 12 perpetrators have already been sentenced for trafficking in human beings and exploitation offences. More than 50 victims of exploitation have so far been identified. 26 services have been equipped with an automatic tool to filter information about open and legal prostitution advertisements on relevant internet portals, which led to 3 investigations in the first three months.

The project could be prolonged for one year because of the delay caused by the pandemic, and there is concrete expectation that new EU funding will be granted until 2025. Without this, the project would not have been possible. Projects like these can create considerable added value since they gather experienced experts and provide them with the necessary means to develop new strategies to support investigation of offenders and bring them to justice.

Ms. Gayer concluded by emphasising the importance of CoE guidelines for policy makers. She highlighted that child-friendly criminal investigation and judicial processes must be put in place following these guidelines. Audio-visual means must be used to take statements from children to avoid repeated questioning. The Barnahus concept provides best practice standards in this respect. Interdisciplinary training is essential for creating mutual trust and providing the basis for co-operation. To combat trafficking, adequate resources, specialist investigators, prosecutors and judges are all needed.

Youth Panel

Thea Myhr

Lightup is a youth organization based in Norway, Germany, and Austria. They mobilise youth through voluntary work, local teams, political debates, and awareness-raising about all forms of human trafficking and sexual exploitation.

It is impossible to only speak of one form of exploitation in the sex industry and not see the connection with other forms of abuse, disadvantages, and sexual exploitation. All forms of abuse are interconnected and there is a need to break the whole cycle in order to end sexual exploitation of children. It's important to emphasise the demand side of the story. Such trends need to be stopped. To achieve this, it is vital to hear young people's voices at international level. It is necessary to strengthen awareness-raising initiatives and educate youth worldwide about the risk of online and offline exploitation. Children and youth must be equipped with knowledge of how they can be powerful agents of change by avoiding risks and contributing to a reduction in the cycle of demand through conscious actions and attitudes.

The latest UNODC Global Report on Trafficking in Persons showed that 50% of victims of human trafficking are victims of sexual exploitation and 7 out of 10 victims are women and girls. This gender dimension needs to be reflected extensively in both national and international efforts to prevent and eradicate sexual exploitation.

'We are in the beginning of a decade of action. In order to achieve sustainable development goals, we need to mobilise stakeholders and civil society. It is not enough to help children out of human trafficking if prevention is lacking. It is necessary to start a critical discussion among young people to prevent the demand for exploitation. By giving young people a chance to speak, they can be drivers for lasting change.'

Egle Puidokaite

KSPSC is a non-governmental, non-profit organisation, established in Klaipeda (Lithuania) in 2003. It provides complex social, psychological, and legal support for women or mothers with children who have suffered from domestic/close relationship violence and human trafficking/prostitution. The goal is to empower victims to take control, to work on helping themselves and achieve their own goals to maximise the quality of their lives.

Even among voluntary participants, some say that sex work is a conscious preference for some women and should be legalised, even though women are objectified so blatantly.

Today we see that social media and global connection plays an ever-more significant role. We are facing new forms of exploitation and organised manipulation of underage girls. We therefore need both knowledge and experience.

Lelde Varca

The Marta Centre was established in May 2000 and is the only women's rights advocacy institution in Latvia. It provides professional social, legal, and psychological services to adult victims of violence and human trafficking, ensures assistance to women and their children in vulnerable life situations and aims to bring Latvia much closer to international human rights standards.

No criminal proceedings of child trafficking have been initiated in Latvia, informing the view that child trafficking does not exist there. The Marta Centre does not agree. Since 2015, Marta has helped 10 child victims, 9 of whom had been sexually exploited.

Unfortunately, law enforcement has classified these crimes as involvement in prostitution and not human trafficking. This raises concerns that the actual numbers may be much higher. Sometimes, protectors trivialise the problem, reassuring children that prostitution is 'normal' and need not be reported. This happens on a regular basis; adult women reach out to Marta Centre to share their stories. The Marta Centre now specialises in human trafficking and sexual exploitation to protect children earlier and prevent such crimes at an earlier stage.

Linda Nieminen

Linda Nieminen's recent thesis investigated the connection between human trafficking and cybersecurity in the European Union cybersecurity policies. Some of the findings are relevant to highlight in the context of human trafficking in the digital era.

Combating human trafficking is one of the top priorities in the European Union and Europol.

However, one of the most significant findings was that human trafficking is not seen as a threat to cybersecurity in the European Union. Globalisation and new information technologies have increased criminals' capacity to traffic human beings. Moreover, the

Internet is an essential part of the traffickers' modus operandi, and the environment has mostly shifted from real life to cyberspace. Technology allows traffickers to communicate instantly with potential victims and indeed, with large numbers of "buyers" across geographical boundaries and over long distances. It seems that human trafficking and cybersecurity are totally separated in current policies. So, if human trafficking is more and more shifting to the cyber environment, how can we combat it, if it is excluded from the policies that are meant to safeguard cyberspace?

Child sexual exploitation is seen as a cybersecurity issue in policy generation but human trafficking as a general crime is not. The conflation between the two is not adequately addressed.

Child Victims of Trafficking – Who are they?

Who are the victims and how are they recruited online? – Julia Muraszkiwicz

Ms Muraszkiwicz began by saying that there are many ways of using technologies to address human trafficking, which is important since new types of exploitation are springing up.

For example, in the UK, as previously referenced, there is a new phenomenon, called County Lines, which is when illegal drugs are transported from one area to another, often across police and local authority boundaries. This is usually done by children or vulnerable people who are coerced into it by criminal gangs. Importing areas (areas where the drugs are taken to) have become areas of increased levels of violence and weapons-related crimes. County Lines is a form of criminal activity in which drug dealers in major cities are establishing supply networks for smaller cities. Young people and children are recruited and used to transport drugs to rural towns and are often recruited through social media. These victims should be seen as victims of crime and not as criminals.

One such example, a 21-year-old male was convicted of recruiting three vulnerable children, two boys and one girl. He transported them by car and train and controlled them by phone. The police found the children starving and exhausted. Victims as such are more prone to be part of criminal acts since the gangs take advantage of their vulnerability and social exclusion. Poverty, family breakdown, developmental disorders

and parent criminality are examples of situations that leads to this kind of child exploitation.

As we learn about prevention, we need to understand vulnerability. We also need to find new ways of identifying children at risk, especially during periods of isolation (such as the Covid-19 pandemic). We need to be ahead of the game, to make sure that we are aware of new trends. We need to investigate the vulnerability and risk context of children relating to other people and locations, ensure secure and ethical partnerships, share data and strengthen professional partnerships.

Self-generated images – Linda Jonsson

Ms Jonsson presentation focussed on online images. Nude self-generated images range from non-coercive to coercive and the grey zone in between. Some believe that the internet is not the “real world” so interactions there don’t matter. Online sexual abuse crimes should be classified in the same way as real sexual abuse crimes. Professionals sometimes don’t see online abuse as serious and the victims are therefore not taken seriously.

A self-generated image could either be a picture taken for fun or it could be malignant abuse. It is therefore important to ask the child what the image really means and the reasons for producing it.

In one recent study, youth in Sweden were asked if they have ever sexted or taken nude pictures of themselves. Results showed that one third of Swedish youth had actually done it whereas 50% of them said that they were asked to send nude pictures.

Pornography is another influencing factor and a polarising topic in Sweden. One study showed that children and youth who watch pornography are more prone to send nude images than children who are not. Many respondents said that they sent nude images because it was fun and flirty and a way of meeting new people to have sex with. Others said that the main reason was attention-seeking. Alternatively, they were threatened to do so.

Another study investigated 6000 students in the context of health consequences after online sexual abuse. The research focused on online grooming, victims of sexual abuse, victims meeting strangers online and whether there were any documented cases. Results showed that students who had been asked for pictures had more experience with sexual

abuse and/or being bullied. This group were less healthy and had lower self-esteem. The same health conditions, trauma and severe psychological symptoms were found in the group that had experienced online sexual abuse by a stranger.

Another study focused on the analysis of 50 Court documents about men who abused hundreds of child victims. The results showed two patterns: the sweet talk and the threats. The sweet talk is when the perpetrator talks to the victim in a friendly way in order to strengthen their relationship, mostly by using flattery and flirty words, similar to grooming. However, pressure and threats were more prevalent when the perpetrator is repeatedly nagging, offering money or using emotional extortion. The child victims said that they had no other choice than to do what the perpetrator asked. They stressed that they were very scared that the pictures would be published.

In conclusion, Ms Jonsson said that a child victim's mental health is negatively impacted with other severe mental consequences such as anxiety, fear, lack of trust and social exclusion.

The Swedish legislature has now begun to consider online sexual abuse as rape of a child.

Impact of trafficking on children – Ethel Quayle

Ms. Quayle initially referenced a case involving a 15-year-old girl who was offered a job as a model but was lured into forced sexual activity.

She shared this story because it captures important elements in the context of human trafficking. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has called on social media platforms to use big data and artificial intelligence to help eliminate trafficking in women and girls. It has also been noted repeatedly that the current Covid-19 pandemic has made it worse for victims. Perpetrators have easy access to potential victims using the dark net and different social media platforms. The increased recruitment of vulnerable people for online sexual exploitation, along with an increased demand for child sexual abuse material and technology, have all facilitated child sex trafficking. Internet technologies provide novel and efficient methods that enable traffickers to communicate and find their victims. For example, VOIPs (such as Skype) have not only been used to keep in touch with one another during the pandemic but have also been used to facilitate live streaming of sexual abuse and online sexual trafficking of children. She says: "Our ability to change people's behaviour is a very difficult task, whether they are the

offenders or the victims. Children have the right to engage with others online, but others do not have the right to abuse children there”.

Traffickers still use traditional venues to recruit children, including schools, group homes, bus stations, playgrounds, and malls. However, recruitment via technology has become increasingly common. Traffickers use the internet as a vehicle to meet children in order to prepare them for sexual encounters and lure them into sex trafficking. They take advantage of online marketing services to effectively advertise sexual services and solicit victims via classified advertisement websites, specific escort sites, and other platforms (e.g., social media marketing, search engine marketing, and mobile advertising). Even if some platforms close or have stopped advertising sexual services involving children, more spring up, targeting the exploiters and buyers. Furthermore, digital payments can be used at all stages of the trafficking process, from grooming and recruitment where a trafficker may entice a child by paying phone bills or transferring money in return for photos or videos, to the use of prepaid gift cards to pay for postings on online advertising websites, and anonymous cryptocurrency payments for sex or sexual abuse material.

The impact on victims is severe. Sexual violence both off and online leads to mental as well as physical injuries. We need to close the gateways that provide opportunities for people to do considerable harm to young people and children.

The Internet Watch Foundation recommends awareness programs aimed at parents and younger children which address the risks of online streaming services. We need to widen our implementation of existing solutions to tackle online distribution of captured live-streamed child sexual abuse by service providers. We also need to develop and implement new solutions including video hashing technology to detect such captures.

Identification, Justice and Recovery

Operation Relapse: Identification and investigation – Jörgen Lindeberg

Mr Lindeberg is a Swedish Police Detective Inspector at the National Operation Department. He focused his presentation on “digital rape”.

Under Swedish law, digital/online rape is not a crime. However, it is important to understand that even if it takes place online, the damage to the victims is the same as if it would have happened in real life. A current trend is that perpetrators often spend less

time grooming children, they move instantly to threats and coercion. They are usually systematic, alternately calm, and aggressive and always impose time pressure on the child. This is both simple and effective.

He cited a Swedish case involving severe online sexual abuse of children from different countries. The perpetrator used a popular online platform for children to identify and contact victims. The actual abuse took place over communication channels such as Skype and were recorded. Many messages containing threats and coercion, child sexual abuse images and films were found, involving abuse of 27 children. After substantial investigation and cross-border police collaboration, children were identified in the US, Canada, and the UK. The perpetrator was apprehended and later sentenced to 10 years in prison for several crimes, including online sexual abuse, of children.

International co-operation was successful in this case, but it can be complicated. The internet has no borders, but the real world does. Different international and national jurisdictions, different definitions of crimes against children, plus problems in sharing information are key obstacles to cross-border investigation and collaboration.

Supporting child protection stakeholders in the prevention of recruitment of children into CSE and human trafficking online - Maia Rusakova and Vladlena Avdeeva

Ms Rusakova started by saying that it is impossible to create evidence-based programs without open discussion about what works and what doesn't.

As online communication proliferates, demand increases, as does the risk of online grooming. Different tools and metrics have emerged to manage these trends, such as strengthened child protection, educational provision, expert input and international co-operation. Sharing and exchanging information is crucial.

Statistics have shown an increased demand for Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM) and increased risks for online grooming and child sexual exploitation. Children have become more vulnerable to trafficking due to school closure, economic downturn and because they spend more time online.

Ms Rusakova referred to the New National Referral Mechanism developed by OSCE/ODIHR in 2020 as a positive development. It focuses on a co-operative framework through which state actors fulfil their obligations to protect and promote the human rights of trafficked

persons, including children, and co-ordinate their efforts in a strategic partnership with civil society.

The collaboration with the CBSS contributes to the co-operation of key child protection and anti-trafficking organisations in the region at grassroots as well as governmental level. Ms Avdeeva introduced a project funded by the CBSS, called “Strengthening the Prevention of Child Trafficking and Child Sexual Exploitation related to Information and Communication Technologies.” Its goal is to provide child protection specialists with relevant information and strategies to help prevent child trafficking and sexual exploitation using ICT.

The concept is to develop tools for children, caregivers, and stakeholders, implement training projects and support local child protection officials. Further, it also tries to combine international trends and priorities with local features to protect children online and support specialists with their prevention work.

Ms Avdeeva introduced a training module and guidance on “Protecting children from CSE and recruitment in human trafficking online”, which includes eight thematic sessions, feedback forms, plus an awareness evaluation form. So far, the tool has reached 738 specialists, 582 in the Baltic Sea Region, and 156 beyond. Results have confirmed considerable interest and stakeholders are keen to use them.

Enabling a multidisciplinary response, the role of the Barnahus Model – Nadine Finch

Ms Finch introduced a report by Child Circle, commissioned by the CBSS, on the role of Barnahus in hearing and assisting child victims of trafficking. The Barnahus model supports children through their journey in Barnahus, focusing on identification, justice, and recovery. The study, which was commissioned by the CBSS looked at the situation in Iceland, Sweden, Norway, Lithuania, Finland, and Estonia.

Trafficked children are very **isolated** and it’s not sufficient to only offer them therapy at the end of their recovery.

The study reviews the role of the Barnahus Model, and similar models, in order to enhance responses and protection offered to child victims of trafficking, which will build on the multidisciplinary and child centred approach embodied therein.

The Barnahus model is relevant in the context of trafficking in children since it includes:

- procedural measures to protect children in criminal proceedings such as video recorded forensic interviews in the same location as medical examination and initial therapeutic support.
- the idea that children typically do not have to attend court in person nor be interviewed by multiple actors.
- a multidisciplinary process including criminal investigation, child protection , physical and mental health

Barnahus' involvement typically is with children involved in criminal proceedings as victims of sexual or physical abuse. In some cases, the target group for Barnahus includes children who have been trafficked or subjected to on-line abuse.

Ms Finch emphasised that there also is positive use of digital technology, for example sharing recorded interviews with relevant actors, on-line information about countries of origin, developing specific interview protocols and sharing existing data about a child's history, as risks emerge.

Some current obstacles experienced by Barnahus in terms of hearing and supporting child victims of trafficking are:

- National Referral Mechanisms are not presently comprehensive.
- Referral mechanisms to Barnahus are typically restricted to one or two agencies.
- Training, interview protocols and outreach work do not necessarily address child trafficking, on-line abuse, or strategies to build necessary trust.
- A lack of collaboration with NGOs providing assistance to victims.
- A lack of collaboration with migration services – in relation to residence permits or risks if child returned under Dublin III.

Ms Finch provided a series of recommendations based on the findings of the report, including:

- Enhanced co-ordination between child protection, criminal justice and migration agencies using digital technology and Barnahus expertise.
- Embedding Barnahus within this wider system, even if only for certain purposes as appropriate for different Barnahus practices, such as exploratory interviews where trafficking is suspected or more systematic screening for trafficking indicators when children are referred to Barnahus.

- Enhanced capacity building in Barnahus and wider child protection and criminal justice systems in relation to trafficking.
- Sharing of child trafficking and child protection expertise on a regional level across the Baltic Sea States.

Country Case Example – Lithuania – Lolita Plančiūnaitė-Vaičiulienė

Ms. Plančiūnaitė-Vaičiulienė, presented an overview of the current human trafficking situation in Lithuania. Statistics indicated increased interest during the pandemic in prohibited material on child sexual abuse online.

In 2020, the National Cyber Security report stated that the Covid-19 lockdown contributed to an increased volume of distribution of child sexual abuse material. In 2020, 78 online child sexual abuse cases were detected while in 2019, it was 44. Worryingly, in 2019, the internet hotline received 100 notifications about prohibited information whereas in 2020 there were 1500. So far this year, the hotline has already received more than 2200 notifications. Analysing data from 2017-2020, 52 child abuse crimes and 32 crimes of child abuse images were registered but no child trafficking crimes were registered at all, clearly not a reflection of reality.

Cyber-space has become an environment for criminals to find, recruit, deceive, transfer, and sexually exploit their victims. Trafficking in human beings have become difficult to recognise, thus even more difficult to identify the perpetrators.

How do we become aware of sexually abused and exploited children online? First, from whistle-blowers, secondly cases identified by law enforcement agencies, child protection and social services.

The Lithuanian police is part of an EU platform against criminal threats relating to trafficking. Additionally, Lithuania has joined the Interpol child sexual exploitation database and since 2015 we joined the US missing and exploited children database.

In Europe, one in five children experience some form of sexual violence. In 2019, police officers found a cache of 200 photos of a young woman. From the filename it was deduced that the victim was from Lithuania. One of the pictures depicted a school which the Lithuanian police were able to identify. Four adult men were sharing data about victims with each other, including images of 20 young girls aged between 9 and 12. In 2016 the suspects were sentenced to 67 years in prison.

Self-evidently, identification of perpetrators is vital. The example also illustrates how uncontrolled distribution can so easily spread. When an investigation is successful, it encourages us to persist.

Ms. Plančiūnaitė-Vaičiulienė shared a few concrete recommendations to prevent this form of abuse and exploitation.

Talk to children, teach them safeguarding rules such as ‘don’t engage with strangers online; they may not be who they present themselves to be, stop communicating with them, block them, don’t forget to save the evidence - do not delete anything and report them to the police.’

Police officers are taught that the best interest of the child is the highest priority and procedures are in place to minimise the risk of secondary trauma, for example only necessary pre-trial questions are put to the child.

Youth panel

Egle Puidokaite

Listening to conference speakers made me think about what we’re doing right but most importantly what we are doing wrong and what we can do better.

Trafficking of human beings, whether victims are adults or underaged, always starts in one’s childhood. It is therefore important to provide basic education about sexual abuse, self-awareness, boundaries, sexuality and so on. These are crucial and need to be introduced at an early age.

Parents are the primary educators about the risks of the internet, sexual abuse, sexuality and so on; it is acknowledged that sometimes parents themselves need education.

Another problem is the media. For example, many Hollywood movies and rap songs portray prostitution as something glamorous and cool. One such is the movie ‘Pretty Woman’, presented as a Cinderella story where the man is the hero, and the woman is the vulnerable victim needing salvation. Women have their fundamental rights and don’t

necessarily need to be saved or empowered, neither must we neglect educating boys about these fundamental ideas.

Thea Myhr

As a closing remark I would like to raise one last message that we in Lightup Norway find very important. To address the issue of sexual exploitation through online devices, we need to talk about pornography and racism.

Young people's main source of sex education is not in school but in pornography and violent cross-racial and sexist pornography has become mainstream. Commercial sex is predominantly used by white men while victims of sex trafficking are disproportionately women and girls of colour. Addressing sexual exploitation means addressing racism.

"Refugee Porn" whose popularity has grown in recent years, deserves mention. It started in 2015 along with the refugee crisis. In Germany alone, key words such as "refugee porn" have been searched 800 000 times per month on one of Germany's biggest porn sites. The videos found under this specific category are difficult to watch since many of them are highly exploitative, being both dehumanising and racist. Furthermore, most mainstream porn applauds gender inequality.

In Lightup, we believe that online sexual exploitation cannot be prevented without a hard look at mainstream pornography and the social damage it causes.

Lilde Varda

If we really want to fight this and stop child trafficking, then we need to start with prevention and education including police, social workers and the judiciary.

Also, we must find a way to include this topic more aggressively into the school curriculum so that children really understand all the risks. A single lecture won't really solve the problem.

Linda Niemenen

Child exploitation is a transnational issue which makes it difficult to solve. I myself worry about self-generated images and the change in attitude that young people have about such images.

Social media platforms as well as influencers portray nude images as something which is cool and fun. This makes it dangerous since children and young people don't realise that sharing these has real consequences. Hence, education is really important and it's also very important to listen to young people's voices on this very sensitive issue.

Closing remarks

Grzegorz Poznanski – Director General, CBSS

Mr Poznanski expressed his gratitude to the current Lithuanian Presidency for organising and prioritising such an important conference about child protection and human trafficking.

Based on work and expertise of the CBSS Children at Risk Unit and Task Force on Trafficking of Human Beings, the CBSS is well suited to build and enhance good practice, foster international collaboration and real action in the Baltic Sea Region and beyond.

Furthermore, CBSS focuses on Youth Action and involvement, constantly ensuring that the voices of youth are heard. Colleagues of CBSS have made the Baltic Sea Youth Platform an important tool in Youth Action.

Mr Poznanski thanked the Youth Panel in particular assuring them that all conference attendees have listened to their forthright messages and statements, and that CBSS will commit to disseminate them through its various channels.

The CBSS is focused making the Baltic Sea Region safe, secure, prosperous and sustainable. The CBSS vision is to make the region one where children enjoy their rights as recognised in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, including the right to a non-violent childhood. He stated: "We reaffirm our commitment to end all forms of violence, including trafficking and exploitation offline and online. Each of us is responsible for protecting our children; this is not only the responsibility of child protection agencies, anti-trafficking actors or law enforcement authorities. Each of us, as a parent, a friend, a

teacher, a neighbour is responsible for children's safety. Digital environments may cloak the perpetrators, but we should have our eyes open to recognise a child in distress. This cannot simply be ignored since as we have heard today, the consequences of abuse and exploitation are grave."

The CBSS reaffirms the Children at Risk and Trafficking in Human Beings as CBSS flagship priorities, including further implementation of the Barnahus concept. Mr Poznanski restated the CBSS commitment to prevent and combat trafficking of children in the digital environment and to assist and support the victims and noted that the CBSS acknowledges the increasing importance of communication technologies in children's lives, and the opportunities it presents for their education, communication, access to information and entertainment.

At the same time, we acknowledge the risk of harm that children may be exposed to online, including trafficking and other forms of exploitation and abuse. The Internet has become a mechanism by which children are lured in, recruited, and exploited for various illegal purposes.

Mr Poznanski also emphasised the importance of effective, swift, and sensitive identification of child victims and provision of child-friendly justice, assistance with and safe pathways to recovery require collaborative approaches, which involve relevant players in the public and private sectors as well as anti-trafficking and child protection actors at the local, national, and international level.

Building children's resilience by addressing particular vulnerabilities and enhancing their knowledge about online harms and risk factors should be a priority.

The CBSS – together with our partners in the Baltic Sea Region and beyond – including with the European Union, Council of Europe, Organisation for Security and Collaboration in Europe, as well as UN-system partners and NGOs – will build upon on our work on child protection and human trafficking, as well as on today's conference findings.

The CBSS will make the utmost use of regional collaborative networks, such as the Baltic Sea Region Border Control Co-operation, the Baltic Sea Task Force on Organised Crime and the Baltic Sea States Network of Prosecutors-General. We also need to build understanding and awareness, also set guidelines at sub-regional and local levels, including local authorities and societies. The CBSS will work with our local and sub-regional networks and civil society partners.

Mr Poznanski concluded by thanking all the speakers and participants for their presentations, contributions, and lively discussions. He also thanked the Youth Panel once again for their work and delivery of important messages on these critical and very current issues.

trust