



National Rapporteur on Trafficking in
Human Beings and Sexual Violence
against Children

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UN Committee on the Rights of the Child

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Date 4 June 2021
Concerning Written statement pre-session of the Netherlands 2021

Dear members of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child,

In advance of the pre-session of the Netherlands initiated by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, the National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings and Sexual Violence against Children is honoured to be able to share updates and new developments concerning human trafficking and sexual violence against children, as seen in our three most recent publications¹. This written statement is supplementary to our contribution to the List of Issues Prior to Reporting, which the National Rapporteur has submitted to the CRC in 2019.

I. Multiple and complex problems

It has become more noticeable in recent years that multiple and complex underlying problems are closely related to experiencing various forms of sexual violence. According to a number of professionals interviewed in a case study of the comprehensive approach to sexual violence against young women in Amsterdam², the sexual violence experienced by these girls is a consequence of being unsafe in the past. The girls, as well as the families they come from, have to deal with an accumulation of problems in several areas of life. This makes it apparent that sexual violence does not occur in isolation. Therefore, a multidimensional analysis of these problems is required. The foreseen reorganisation of the Dutch youth care and child protection system is a good opportunity for the government to focus on the improvement of youth care services so that specialised help can be provided in a timely manner to victims of sexual violence.

Besides, the outcomes of our latest reports show a growing overlap between the two mandates of the institute: exploitation and sexual violence against children. In the context of multi-problem backgrounds and organised crime, exploitation and sexual violence cannot be seen separately from one another. The nature, extent and context of these two problems have become more complex and fluid over the years. It is therefore beneficial that the overlap between vulnerable groups and various forms of crime is considered in order to develop a comprehensive approach, and that continuous learning takes place.

¹ Human Trafficking Victims Monitoring Report 2015-2019; Reliance on resilience: A case study of the comprehensive approach to sexual violence against young women in Amsterdam; Human Trafficking Offenders Monitoring Report 2015-2019

² Reliance on resilience: A case study of the comprehensive approach to sexual violence against young women in Amsterdam

II. National multi-year programme *Together against human trafficking*

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The urgency of the often complex problems underlines the importance of the interdepartmental programmes deployed by the last cabinet, such as *Together against human trafficking*. Although important first steps have been taken with this programme the past years, the future approach should be broadened and deepened. Since local governments have an essential role in preventing, recognising and combatting exploitation, it is crucial to better safeguard and support the local approach. The National Rapporteur does not call for the development of new policy initiatives. Instead, it is necessary to strengthen implementation and support for professionals who are in daily contact with (potential) offenders and victims. The interdepartmental programme *Violence does not have a place in the home; Tackling domestic violence and child abuse* is a good example. With help that is close to the vulnerable target groups, we can gain a good understanding of complex problems and provide accessible help. The National Rapporteur stresses that priority should go to intensifying the measures as set out in action line 3: Prevention of victimization and perpetration.

III. *Young victims and offenders, and the online world*

Remarkably, our most recent data manifest that victims and offenders of exploitation are mostly children and adolescents. Most human trafficking offenders in the Netherlands, roughly half, are guilty of domestic sexual exploitation. On average, they are also the youngest, with one in three being under the age of 23 at the time they offended.³ In addition, on average, 40% of reported victims of human trafficking are under the age of 23. Victims of domestic sexual exploitation are comparatively much more likely to be minors or adolescents than victims of other forms of human trafficking.⁴ Moreover, victim and offender status may overlap, with young victims and offenders potentially suffering from various types of complex personal problems⁵. When young people become caught up in these types of exploitation, this is disruptive to their development and their future. That is why every effort must be made to prevent this from happening. Our data show that relatively few supervisions have been inserted in the probation service for offenders of human trafficking. Resocialisation is key to preventing offenders from reoffending and thereby also in preventing people from (repeated) victimhood. An approach that aligns with this specific group of young offenders is critical to successful resocialisation.⁶

Furthermore, the National Rapporteur sees that recruitment and exploitation is increasingly taking place online within this age group. While young people are online 24/7, the presence of the government and its partners is not enough to effectively combat exploitation. It is therefore important to pay particular attention on this target group and the role of technology by developing interventions. While international studies emphasise the role played by technology in sexual exploitation and victimization, it is not yet evident in Dutch registration data at this moment.⁷ The National Rapporteur therefore recommends to thoroughly identify and analyse the role of technology in sexual exploitation, as well as to make the youth part of the policy development, as they are logically tech-savvy.

³ Human Trafficking Offenders Monitoring Report 2015-2019

⁴ Human Trafficking Victims Monitoring Report 2015-2019

⁵ Reliance on resilience: A case study of the comprehensive approach to sexual violence against young women in Amsterdam

⁶ Human Trafficking Offenders Monitoring Report 2015-2019

⁷ Human Trafficking Victims Monitoring Report 2015-2019

IV. *Impact of COVID-19*

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The National Rapporteur is conscious about the impact COVID-19 has had since early 2020 on trafficking in human beings and sexual violence against children. There are signs that the global coronavirus crisis has given rise to new forms of victimisation. Due to the pandemic it is highly likely that the demand for and the supply of sex currently intersect at less visible locations, such as online. It is probably because of the various lockdowns that the online world takes a more prominent place in the daily lives of the children. Several organisations have reported increases in areas such as online sexual abuse, sextortion (extortion using nude images) and grooming. Improved monitoring and insight at the national as well as the local level are crucial to find out what the actual impact of COVID-19 is and to implement appropriate measures.

V. *Sexual health and education*

Our case study in Amsterdam⁸ revealed that many girls do not have an adequate reference framework for relationships and sexuality. They are unaware of their own sexual wishes and boundaries and therefore fail to recognise when someone transgresses those boundaries. This also applies to sexuality online. The newness of this phenomenon contributes even more to the lack of an adequate reference framework in this area. Where girls are sometimes unaware of their victimhood, boys are also sometimes unaware of their offenderhood because they themselves lack the guidance to be able to make choices in this area. Therefore, the National Rapporteur believes it is of utmost importance that the Dutch government collaborates with the educational sector to equip teachers and develop evidence-based teaching programmes that can guidance both potential victims and offenders in their early youth on (online) sexuality, and provide support in their sexual development. This will allow them to determine for themselves what their boundaries are and how they can indicate them, and might help them to assess the consequences of their actions for others.

VI. *Vulnerable children in migration flows*

At last, we would like to focus on another group that particularly stands out in our latest reports. This is the group of vulnerable children in migration flows, such as unaccompanied minor aliens (for instance from Vietnam) who are at risk to be abused and exploited, both in the Netherlands and on their journey. Their protection and support is increasingly under threat. Research by the Expertise Centre for Human Trafficking and Human Smuggling (EMM)⁹ and the Analysis Experimental Ground Migration Chain (APM)¹⁰ show that 97 percent of Vietnamese children disappear from protected reception centres. The ultimate destination of the Vietnamese children is often the United Kingdom.

Although the Dutch government recognises that the results of the studies confirm previous suspicions about this group and assures that these issues have national and international attention, the approach remains unchanged. This is incomprehensible given the urgency of this problem and the vulnerability of this group of children. Several bottlenecks stand in the way of an adequate and coordinated approach. For example, the missing protocol is not always followed.

⁸ Reliance on resilience: A case study of the comprehensive approach to sexual violence against young women in Amsterdam

⁹ The disappearance of Vietnamese unaccompanied minor aliens and the relation of Vietnamese people to human trafficking and smuggling in the Netherlands (2015-2018)

¹⁰ APM Analysis: Unaccompanied minor aliens leaving with unknown destination

There is also a fragmentation of knowledge and information, and the various reporting parties do not unambiguously supply signals to the EMM. The Dutch state should take responsibility and protect these children by starting to map out the nature and extent of the problem. This is essential for improving the approach. In view of the international dimension of the problem, it is important that these investigations are also carried out in a European context.

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Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'H' followed by a long horizontal stroke.

Herman Bolhaar
*Dutch National Rapporteur on Trafficking
in Human Beings and Sexual Violence
against Children*