



SWEDISH GENDER  
EQUALITY AGENCY

# PROSTITUTION AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Final report on the assignment to strengthen work to combat the exploitation of children, young people and adults through prostitution and human trafficking, as well as to survey of the extent of prostitution and human trafficking

Report 2021:23

**The Swedish Gender Equality Agency**

Gothenburg, January 2021

Report 2021:23

Reg. no. ALLM 2020/100

**If you have any questions about this publication, please contact:**

Frida Johansson

Telephone 070-784 74 75

# CONTENTS

<b>PREFACE.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>1. THE ASSIGNMENT .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>2. IMPLEMENTATION .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>3. RESULTS.....</b>	<b>13</b>
3.1. Survey of extent – summary of results .....	13
3.1.1. Implementation .....	13
3.1.2. Difficulties estimating the extent of prostitution.....	14
3.1.3. How widespread is prostitution in Sweden today? .....	15
3.1.4. Who buys sexual services in Sweden? .....	16
3.1.5. Who sells sexual services in Sweden? .....	16
3.1.6. What are the conditions and circumstances that lead people to buy and sell sexual services? .....	17
3.1.7. Which arenas are used to buy and sell sexual services? .....	18
3.1.8. What interventions are needed for people who buy sexual services? What do stakeholders think about the interventions in place and their treatment by authorities and non-profit organisations? .....	19
3.1.9. What interventions are needed for people who sell sexual services? What do stakeholders think about the initiatives in place and their treatment by authorities and third-sector organisations? .....	20
3.2. The impact of the pandemic .....	21
3.2.1. Shifting manifestations of prostitution and the work of authorities .....	21
3.2.2. Focus on children – effects of the pandemic .....	22
3.3. Inter-agency cooperation and initiatives .....	22
3.3.1. Inter-agency cooperation.....	22
3.3.2. Initiatives in the area .....	26
3.3.3. Focus on children – inter-agency cooperation and initiatives.....	28
3.4. Method support and competence development.....	31
3.4.1. Methodological support.....	31
3.4.2. Preventive work .....	33
3.4.3. Competence development .....	36
3.4.4. Focus on children – method support and competence development .....	37

<b>4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....</b>	<b>38</b>
4.1. The importance of continuously surveying the extent of prostitution.....	38
4.2. New arenas and manifestations require new approaches.....	39
4.3. The vulnerability of young people needs to be made visible.....	40
4.4. Particularly vulnerable groups.....	42
4.5. The need for qualitative and equal support across the country .....	44
4.6. Effective measures require knowledge and a professional approach.....	45
4.7. Recommendations .....	46
4.7.1. A strengthened children’s rights perspective.....	47
<b>REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>49</b>

# PREFACE

Since 2019, the Swedish Gender Equality Agency has been engaged in a special assignment from the government to strengthen the work to combat the exploitation of children and young people and adults in prostitution and human trafficking. According to the instructions for the assignment, the agency must coordinate the work to combat human trafficking for all purposes, develop cooperation between authorities and other actors, including international actors, and assist the efforts of authorities and other actors through methodological support and competence development. The agency is also tasked with promoting the development of preventive efforts in the area.

Within the framework of the assignment, we have surveyed the current state of cooperation between authorities and efforts that are being taken in this area. We have also developed an online training course for professionals and a campaign aimed at parents. The importance of continuously monitoring the extent of prostitution and ways it manifests itself has become clear. On behalf of the Swedish Gender Equality Agency, the University of Gothenburg carried out a survey to investigate the extent of prostitution and human trafficking, showing that these forms of exploitation have become even more widespread, and vulnerable groups have become even more vulnerable. The risk that children and young people will be exposed to prostitution and human trafficking has increased. This trend is not only the result of the pandemic, it is also largely due to recent technological advancements. Perpetrators can connect with potential victims through a host of new forums, such as dating apps and games aimed at children.

In order to reverse this worrying trend, long-term, strategic efforts are needed to develop initiatives that reach the most vulnerable (for example qualitative, equal support throughout Sweden), but above all, we need to be able to work proactively to reduce demand, which is the starting point for the government's policy towards combating prostitution and human trafficking and the national strategy to combat men's violence against women. Prostitution and human trafficking are part of men's violence against women, and as stated in the sixth national gender equality policy goal, "Men's violence against women must stop".

Lena Ag  
Director General  
September 2021

## SUMMARY

The Swedish Gender Equality Agency has been tasked with strengthening the work to combat the exploitation of children and young people and adults in prostitution and human trafficking, as well as to survey the extent of prostitution and human trafficking for sexual purposes in Sweden.

In this report, the Swedish Gender Equality Agency presents an account of this assignment, which also includes the collection and dissemination of knowledge, support materials and good practice examples of interventions and cooperation between authorities.

## IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ASSIGNMENT

In order to carry out work that effectively prevents and combats prostitution and human trafficking, it is vital to continuously update knowledge in the area being investigated and to reveal general trends. The Swedish Gender Equality Agency therefore engaged researchers at the University of Gothenburg to carry out a survey to reveal the extent of the phenomenon. This effort has, in particular, focused on the extent, conditions, arenas and needs. Within the framework of the assignment, the Swedish Gender Equality Agency has also distributed its own questionnaires and engaged in dialogue with authorities, municipalities, agencies and Civil Society Organisations. Based on this work, the agency has launched an online training for professionals and a parent campaign.

The agency has also compiled a knowledge support tool on the web and started work to develop knowledge and methods for preventive efforts to reduce the demand for the purchase of sexual services.

## PROSTITUTION TRENDS IN SWEDEN

The survey shows that the extent of prostitution in Sweden seems to be fairly consistent over time. However, it appears that the pandemic has led to an increase in the number of people involved in prostitution in Sweden and further increased the vulnerability of a group of people who were already particularly vulnerable. People

with experience of prostitution generally have high levels of ill-health, anxiety and vulnerability to crime.

Street prostitution has continued to decline in several cities. However, since the last national survey was conducted in 2014, there has been a marked increase in the number of websites that explicitly market the sale of sexual services. Another trend is the clear professionalization of communication, design patterns and business models for the activity. Sexual services are openly offered through advertisements in nearly 200 locations across the country. Many times, contacts are also made over social media platforms or “sugar dating sites”.

### **PARTICULARLY VULNERABLE GROUPS**

Several agencies and organisations can testify to an increasing number of young people, especially girls, who are seeking support after being exposed to commercial sexual exploitation. It is common for adults to seek out children and young people for sexual purposes via game apps or social media platforms. Children and young people with a history of sexual abuse, people with intellectual disabilities or mental illness, LGBTQI people and people with substance abuse problems are identified as vulnerable groups. Migrants without residence permits and unaccompanied children are also particularly vulnerable. Many migrants who are victims of human trafficking are also victims of multiple forms of exploitation. This mainly concerns sexual exploitation in combination with begging, labour exploitation or exploitation for criminal activities.

### **DEFICIENCIES IN GUIDELINES, KNOWLEDGE AND TREATMENT**

Organisations that work with people who are victims of prostitution and human trafficking generally have good knowledge of the methodological support that is available. They also point to the regional coordinators as an important resource in their work. However, there are certain deficiencies in the social services, health care sector and among law enforcement agencies in general. These entities are largely perceived to lack the knowledge and methods needed to detect victims and support people who have been exploited in prostitution and human trafficking. In response to this deficit, the Swedish Gender Equality Agency has developed an online training course on sexual exploitation, prostitution and human trafficking, which was launched in June 2021. The identified knowledge deficit, combined with the lack of national guidelines, also means that access to specialized support is unevenly distributed across the country. Many vulnerable people feel that they are not offered the right support or treatment.

And when it comes to the target group's own experiences in their encounters with authorities, the survey shows major shortcomings. Reports of stigmatization and discrimination are widespread. There is also a clear need to strengthen the children's perspective and the support that is offered to children and young people.

### **KNOWLEDGE SUPPORT, METHODOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT AND PREVENTIVE WORK**

If we are to end the exploitation of children, young people and adults in prostitution, work to combat demand is central. To date, few methodological approaches and working methods have been evaluated. Therefore, an evaluation of the clinic for buyers of sexual services (BOSS) in Gothenburg has been carried out within the framework of the assignment. The evaluation yielded positive results. The Swedish Gender Equality Agency has therefore worked in collaboration with several county administrative boards and FoU i Väst to initiate a continued evaluation on the national level.

The evaluation will study the impact and document the working methods at all BOSS clinics in Sweden. The agency has also started a mapping literature review of internationally published research to identify preventive methods and working methods to apply in the area. In connection with the launch of the Swedish Gender Equality Agency's new website in autumn 2021, materials and support tools will also be collected in one, easily accessible place.



# 1. THE ASSIGNMENT

In this chapter, we present the Swedish Gender Equality Agency's special government assignment.

In the autumn of 2019, the Swedish Gender Equality Agency was tasked with strengthening the work to combat the exploitation of children and young people and adults in prostitution and human trafficking, as well as to survey the extent of prostitution and human trafficking for sexual purposes in Sweden. (A2019/01571/JÄMA2019/00873/JÄM).<sup>1</sup>

The assignment specifies that the Swedish Gender Equality Agency shall:

- Report on good practice examples in terms of interventions and inter-agency cooperation in matters concerning children and young people and adults who are exploited in prostitution or human trafficking, and survey local and regional interventions for this group and the group that buys sexual services.
- Gather and disseminate knowledge and support materials to support professionals in their work with children and young people and adults who are being exploited or are at risk of being exploited in prostitution or human trafficking, as well as to explore how preventive work aimed at the group who buys sexual services can be implemented.
- Offer training initiatives as needed to professionals who encounter children and young people and adults who are being exploited or are at risk of being exploited in prostitution or human trafficking and/or people who exploit this group.
- Survey the extent of prostitution and human trafficking for sexual purposes in Sweden. The scope of the survey must include children as well as adults and shall serve as a supplement to the annual progress report that the Swedish Police Authority submits to the government. In the part of the work that concerns children and young people, special consideration must be given to multiple forms of exploitation.

---

<sup>1</sup> [Uppdrag att stärka arbetet mot att barn och unga respektive vuxna utnyttjas i prostitution och människohandel \[Assignment to strengthen the work to combat exploitation of children and young people and adults in prostitution and human trafficking\], PDF 136 kB \(regeringen.se\)](#)

## 2. IMPLEMENTATION

This chapter presents the approach the Swedish Gender Equality used in carrying out this assignment.

Within the framework of the assignment, the Swedish Gender Equality Agency has consulted with the National Board of Health and Welfare. The Swedish Gender Equality Agency engaged the University of Gothenburg to carry out a survey of the extent of prostitution and human trafficking for sexual purposes based on parts of the National Board of Health and Welfare's model *Förslag till modell för att samla kunskap om prostitution (Proposed model for gathering knowledge about prostitution)* (2016).

Part of the survey was carried out by the company, Glykol AB, which collected data consisting of internet advertisements for the purchase of sexual services throughout the country. The aim was to investigate changes over time. In order to support the county administrative boards' regional work to combat prostitution and human trafficking, another data collection effort was performed to identify internet advertisements, which is reported at regional level.

In addition to the survey of the extent of the phenomenon, the Swedish Gender Equality Agency has:

- Carried out a questionnaire survey to gather good practice examples of inter-agency cooperation, effective methods and initiatives at the regional and local level.
- Reviewed annual reports from Sweden's regional coordinators in order to identify good practice examples of interventions and case-level inter-agency cooperation.
- Held five dialogue meetings based on the government's action plan to combat prostitution and human trafficking in order to identify effective working methods, obstacles and development areas in this effort. The dialogue meetings have been conducted with authorities, specialized organisations, and civil society organisations.
- Based on the government's action plan, held two collaboration meetings with county administrative boards and municipal operations with the aim of identifying effective working methods, obstacles, and development areas in this effort.
- Together with the County Administrative Board of Västra Götaland, co-funded a study of the clinic for buyers of sexual services (BOSS) in Gothenburg. The

clinic, which is part of the social services in the city of Gothenburg, offers treatment to those who buy sex. The study was carried out by researchers at Gothenburg Region's unit for research and development, FoU i Väst. The purpose of the study was to survey how the work with purchasers of sexual services is conducted and the perceived efficacy of the treatment.

- Based on the positive results in the above-mentioned study, a national impact evaluation of the country's BOSS clinics has been initiated together with several county administrative boards. The assignment also includes the documentation and systematization of the clinic's working methods. The evaluation will be carried out by researchers at Gothenburg Region's FoU i Väst.
- Performed a literature search to identify effective methods to prevent prostitution and human trafficking for sexual purposes, as well as sexual abuse and the sexual exploitation of children.
- Conducted several training courses for professionals in the field. The Swedish Gender Equality Agency has trained several of Sweden's workplace inspectors and provided them with the knowledge needed to identify potential victims of human trafficking.
- Arranged meetings with the National Methodology Support Team (NMT). During the assignment, the themes of the meetings held with NMT have included support and protection for children, as well as the link between honour-related violence, prostitution and human trafficking.
- Conducted basic training for professionals in the field on prostitution and human trafficking, as well as the support and protection process for victims of human trafficking in Sweden.
- Distributed the National Referral Mechanism through the regional network of the County Administrative Boards of Sweden and other outlets. The Swedish Gender Equality Agency has previously carried out a major revision of its methodology support.
- Produced work material linked to the National Referral Mechanism
- Trained the regional coordinators in the leadership of group exercises based on the above-mentioned material. The regional coordinators participate in various training initiatives which have been adapted to regional needs.
- Developed an online training course for professionals on the sexual exploitation of children, prostitution, and human trafficking. The online training is offered in response to the need identified during the assignment for basic knowledge about prostitution and human trafficking for a
- Il purposes. Developed texts and compiled material that will be published on the Swedish Gender Equality Agency's website. The new website pages are intended to offer a more comprehensive and relevant knowledge bank for

professionals in the field. Material that will be available on the new website includes news, in-depth knowledge, methodological support for professionals, links to our own trainings and trainings offered by others, materials to use in teaching and useful screening tools.

In connection with its reporting on the assignment, the Swedish Gender Equality Agency will also hold a seminar for professionals to disseminate the results from the survey, the results of the evaluation of KAST Gothenburg and other relevant parts of the assignment.

## 3. RESULTS

In this chapter, we report on what emerged during the Swedish Gender Equality Agency's work while completing the assignment.

A summary of the survey of the extent of prostitution and human trafficking is presented first. We then consider the impact of the pandemic on the area being investigated. In the following section, we present good practice examples in efforts to combat prostitution and human trafficking and cases of inter-agency cooperation in matters concerning children and young people and adults. Information about the agency's work to develop and disseminate methodological support and training, as well as preventive work, is covered in a separate chapter.

To conclude, an analysis and suggestions for continued work in the area investigated are presented. Results concerning children are reported separately.

### 3.1. SURVEY OF EXTENT – SUMMARY OF RESULTS

#### 3.1.1. Implementation

In May 2020, the Swedish Gender Equality Agency engaged two external researchers working at the Department of Social Work at the University of Gothenburg to carry out a survey regarding the extent of prostitution and human trafficking. The University of Gothenburg had overall responsibility for the study's data collection, processing and the compilation of reports. As part of this work, the company Glykol AB also carried out a survey of internet content in order to investigate the prevalence of advertisements for the purchase of sexual services.

Previous surveys have been carried out using different approaches to investigate the extent of the phenomenon. These differences have made it difficult to compare the results and to identify trends over time. The survey performed by Gothenburg University has therefore largely been based on the National Board of Health and Welfare's proposed methodology. It consists of a total of three sub-studies, which aim to answer the following six questions:

- How widespread is prostitution in Sweden today?
- Who purchases sexual services and who sells sexual services in Sweden?
- What are the patterns for those who buy and sell sexual services?
- Which arenas are used to sell sexual services?

- What interventions are needed for people who buy/sell sexual services?
- What do stakeholders think about the initiatives in place and their treatment by authorities and third-sector organisations?

Sub-study 1 is based on interviews with representatives from government authorities and organisations that work with the issues investigated here, as well as the collection and compilation of existing documentation from support and assistance activities.<sup>2</sup> Sub-study 2 consists of a web-based questionnaire aimed at individuals with experience of buying or selling sexual services, as well as an in-depth interview study with people with experience of buying or selling sexual services.<sup>3</sup> Sub-study 3 consists of a survey of advertisements and profiles that offer sexual services via the Internet. In the effort to survey the extent of the phenomenon, reports from other authorities and research results have also been used.

The survey can be read in its entirety in the report *Omfattningskartläggning av prostitution och människohandel för sexuella ändamål (Survey of the extent of prostitution and human trafficking for sexual purposes)* (de Cabo, A. & Hall, A. 2021). Below is a brief summary of the overall results. In the summary of the survey, the concepts the researchers and respondents themselves used in the study are mainly used, for example, the concept “sex for compensation”. In the following part of the report, the Swedish Gender Equality Agency uses the terms prostitution, human trafficking and sexual exploitation.

### 3.1.2. Difficulties estimating the extent of prostitution

Reliably estimating the extent and distribution of prostitution and human trafficking for sexual and other purposes presents a number of inherent problems. One approach is to look at national population studies. However, those in risk groups and who are overrepresented among those with experience selling sex are rarely captured in these studies. Population studies therefore need to be supplemented with other forms of data collection. Data needs to be collected from environments and locations where overrepresented groups, that is groups with experience of sex for compensation and sexual exploitation, are located. Actors active in the field also use different delimitations and definitions to describe the phenomenon. Surveys are also

---

<sup>2</sup> Almost 40 interviews have been conducted with representatives from the specialized clinics within social services and the health care sector, regional coordinators against prostitution and human trafficking, several authorities, several third-sector organisations that work with people with experience of sex for compensation, and selected researchers.

<sup>3</sup> The questionnaire was answered by 176 people who had previously sold sexual services and 50 people who had purchased sexual services. In-depth interviews were conducted with 14 people who had sold selling sexual services and 4 people who had purchased sexual services.

impacted by the resources and knowledge activities and organisations have at their disposal to identify the target group, as well as their access to arenas where prostitution and human trafficking occur. “Hidden” prostitution is also a factor, as not everyone seeks support, and many contacts between buyers and sellers occur through non-public channels or on platforms that are not primarily intended for this purpose. Any attempt to capture the extent of prostitution and human trafficking in Sweden will thus never provide a comprehensive picture. The purpose of this survey is instead to gather as many pieces of the puzzle as possible in order to create a picture of the prevalence, distribution and conditions for prostitution in Sweden today.

### 3.1.3. How widespread is prostitution in Sweden today?

In the Public Health Agency of Sweden’s latest population study from 2017, 1.5 percent of women and 1 percent of men aged 16–84 reported that they had at some point received compensation for sex. Gay, bisexual and queer people were also much more likely to have received compensation for sex (7 percent), compared to heterosexuals (Public Health Agency of Sweden, 2017). In the repeated study *Unga, sex och internet (Young people, sex and the internet)*, similar questions are posed to students in their third year of upper secondary school. In the most recent study in 2021, 1.4 percent of girls and 0.8 percent of boys stated that they have sold sexual services at some point (Svedin et al. 2021).

In particularly vulnerable groups, the proportion is significantly higher than it is for the general population. Previous attempts to investigate the extent of prostitution among particularly vulnerable groups have shown that 24 percent of the female inmates within the Swedish Prison and Probation Service had received compensation for sex. Eleven percent also stated that they had been exposed to human trafficking. Among adult LVM clients<sup>4</sup> who were in the care of the National Board of Board of Institutional Care in 2018, one in three women and 7 percent of men stated that they had at some point engaged in sexual acts for compensation. In youth facilities (LVU clients)<sup>5</sup>, 13 percent of girls and 5 percent of boys stated that they had sex in exchange for compensation. Among this group, 70 percent stated that they had sex for compensation on more than occasion (da Cabo, A. & Hall, A. 2021). Furthermore, a large proportion of those who fall into prostitution in Sweden are migrants. These groups are not captured by population-based studies.

However, both population-based studies and interviews with authorities and organisations that work with the target group indicate that the number of people who sell sex has been relatively consistent over time. There also appears to be a relatively small increase in the number of advertisements and profiles on websites

---

<sup>4</sup> Act on Care of Addicts in Certain Cases (LVM 1988: 870).

<sup>5</sup> Care of Young Persons Act (LVU).

that explicitly offer sexual services in 2020 compared to 2014. In the survey, 12,474 unique advertisements and profiles were identified on 32 different websites. However, this does not reveal much about the number of people involved, as one and the same person can be behind multiple profiles/ads. However, the number of pages has increased significantly since the survey in 2014, when only ten websites were identified. Sexual services are offered throughout Sweden. In total, advertisements can be found in almost 200 localities in the country, with a high concentration in metropolitan regions. It is believed that there has been an increase in the number of people who sell sex in connection with the pandemic. There are also indications that a growing number of young people are coming into contact with, or are contacted by, adults for sexual purposes on the Internet.

### **3.1.4. Who buys sexual services in Sweden?**

Sex for compensation and sexual exploitation are clearly gendered phenomena; those who buy sex in Sweden are predominantly men. This is confirmed in both population-based studies and interviews with the organisations that encounter people in prostitution. In the Public Health Agency of Sweden's population study from 2017, almost 1 in 10 men stated that they had at some point provided compensation for sexual services. The corresponding figure for women in Sweden was 0.5 percent (Public Health Agency of Sweden, 2017). The organisations and authorities that encounter purchasers of sexual services all describe a relatively heterogeneous group, where the individuals are largely described as a cross-section of the male population. However, those who independently seek support or treatment at BOSS clinics across Sweden are mainly heterosexual men over the age of 25 with a history of buying sex from women. At the same time, those working in the police and the judicial system report that there has been a discernible increase in the number of younger men who buy sexual services in recent years. Sixty-five percent of third-year upper secondary school students who sold sex stated that the buyer was under the age of 25. Furthermore, among the people who purchased sex and chose to participate in the current survey, 96 percent are men. What these individuals seem to have in common is that they are critical of Sweden's laws regarding the purchase of sex, and despite the clear intent of this legislation, they do not see anything wrong with their own actions when purchasing sex.

### **3.1.5. Who sells sexual services in Sweden?**

A majority of those who sell sex in Sweden are women. Transgender people and people who do not identify as heterosexual are also overrepresented among the group who sell sex. This picture is confirmed by population-based studies and organisations and activities that work with the target group, as well as by the targeted web questionnaire carried out as part of this survey.



Those who sell sex in Sweden are otherwise a heterogeneous group with different experiences and life situations that affect their conditions in prostitution. In the advertisements and profiles that market sexual services on the Internet, where “background data” has been examined, 80 percent are women, 15 percent are men and 5 percent are transgender. Some 116 different nationalities are represented in the advertisements/profiles. Language and nationality are indicated in just over a quarter of the advertisements/profiles. Of these, just under half indicate Swedish as their nationality, while only 8 percent specify Swedish as their language. A clear majority instead indicate English as their language.

The organisations and activities that encounter people with experience of sex for compensation point to the fact that many individuals are impacted by previous or ongoing experiences of violence, stigmatization, societal discrimination and exclusion, as well as poor mental health. People who depend on selling sex for a living, who have a substance abuse or addiction problem, who are exposed to exploitation by third parties or who are minors, are said to be particularly vulnerable. Some activities and organisations also report that people with intellectual disabilities or neuropsychiatric disorders, such as autism or ADHD, are overrepresented among their target groups. Several also suggest that the proportion of children and young people who have been exposed to commercial sexual exploitation and who seek help at clinics has increased in recent years. The number of reported crimes for the purchase of sexual services from children is also increasing. In 2019, 224 crimes were reported, compared to 131 reported crimes the previous year. Unaccompanied migrant children and young people are also a particularly vulnerable group who have received increasing attention in recent years.

### **3.1.6. What are the conditions and circumstances that lead people to buy and sell sexual services?**

Many of the people with experiences of sex for compensation have a high degree of financial vulnerability and a lack of other means to support themselves. This is especially true among migrants who sell sexual services. In the questionnaire study, only one third of respondents indicated that they receive income through employment or their own business. Many also suffer from poor psychological health. Fewer than half of the respondents to the web questionnaire indicated that their health was good, which can be attributed to exposure to violence and perceived stigmatization, among a number of other factors. Many also report feelings of concern for their own health and safety in relation to selling sex, as well as a concern about being treated badly by the authorities and that family, friends and acquaintances will find out that they sell sex. Over 80 percent of respondents in the questionnaire stated that they had been pressured or exposed to crimes in connection with sex for compensation. A large proportion of those who sold sex also stated that their personal boundaries had been violated and that they had been subjected to coercion

and various types of violence. At the same time, it is noted that few report their exposure to crime due to shortcomings in the way they are treated by the police and the judicial system, as well as the unlikelihood that the perpetrators will face criminal convictions. Migrants who sell sex are particularly vulnerable, as many are reluctant to contact the police for fear of being deported.

Several respondents in the interviews also talk about experiences of being subjected to grooming and sexual abuse as children. In the study *Unga, sex och internet (Young people, sex and the internet)*, it was found that 27 percent of boys and 64 percent of girls who sold sex had also been victims of oral, vaginal or anal sexual abuse earlier in their lives (Svedin et al. 2021).

Many people with a history of selling sex also share experiences of stigmatization, discrimination and exclusion, which can lead to feelings of guilt and shame. This can also mean that people with a history of selling sexual services choose not to seek support for fear that they will be treated poorly by those who are supposed to help them. Groups that are over-represented among those who sell sex, such as migrants, people with substance abuse problems, people with disabilities and LGBTIQI people, often encounter stigmatization and discrimination for a number of reasons, which leads to increased vulnerability.

The pandemic also seems to have increased the vulnerability of people who sell sex. Some individuals who sell sex are also exposed to human trafficking or other types of exploitation linked, for example, to labour, criminal acts or begging. The Swedish Police Authority's progress report for 2019 showed that a total of 276 crimes related to human trafficking were reported during the year and 133 crimes related to the procurement of prostitution. Few of these reports led to criminal charges, and even fewer lead to convictions.

### **3.1.7. Which arenas are used to buy and sell sexual services?**

For both buyers and sellers of sexual services, the most common way to make contact is via the internet or social media. The survey identified 32 different websites that explicitly market the sale of sexual services, and which are all operated from outside Sweden. The number of web pages has increased significantly since the last survey, and there has been a clear trend towards the professionalization of communication. The websites use designs and offer a range of web services that are increasingly becoming indistinguishable from conventional companies. In terms of form and content, the websites are using a business model reminiscent of other forms of e-commerce, where the actors behind the websites are benefiting financially, for example, by collecting fees from those who want to advertise on their websites or through advertising revenue. Contact is also made through other social media platforms, such as Tinder, Instagram, Snapchat, Grindr, Badoo, TikTok, KiK and Onlyfans. So-called "sugar dating sites" are also seen as a means to attract younger people who probably have not purchased or sold sex in other contexts.

Street prostitution appears to have decreased in both Malmö and Gothenburg in recent years, while Stockholm has seen an increase in the number of people who have been identified in street prostitution. According to the figures, people who sell sex on the street are almost exclusively migrants. The sale of sexual services can also occur in massage parlours, often in combination with other forms of labour exploitation. According to the web questionnaire, which was aimed at people with personal experience, the most common locations for the purchase of sex were the seller's or buyer's home and hotels. However, many report that they are increasingly being turned away from hotels when there is a suspicion of prostitution. Sales also take place in cars, outdoors, in rented apartments, in adult movie theatres, public spaces or at the buyer's place of work. Many also reportedly sell sex online, for example, using a webcam or through pictures and/or videos.

### **3.1.8. What interventions are needed for people who buy sexual services? What do stakeholders think about the interventions in place and their treatment by authorities and non-profit organisations?**

Informants from the BOSS clinics highlight the importance of making psychosocial support and treatment widely available to people who buy sexual services across Sweden. Among those who had purchased sex themselves and who responded to the web questionnaire, however, only a few stated that they had ever needed help or support in connection with sex for compensation. Other than testing for HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases, few respondents expressed a need for other interventions. At the same time, stigmatization and fear of poor treatment are seen as obstacles for those who would like to seek support. However, few of the respondents appeared to see their own actions when purchasing sexual services as problematic behaviour. Among respondents who have previously sought support from the BOSS clinics, many seem to primarily perceive that the purchase of sex has caused suffering for themselves or for people close to them, rather than reflecting on how their actions affected the person they purchased sex from. Clients who are referred to BOSS clinics after having been arrested for buying sex are reported to have significantly lower motivation to change compared to those who apply to the clinic on their own initiative. Organisations and activities that reach the target group also emphasize the importance of preventive efforts. Furthermore, there also seems to be a lack of interventions and activities that are aimed at or reach young people who buy sex.

### **3.1.9. What interventions are needed for people who sell sexual services? What do stakeholders think about the initiatives in place and their treatment by authorities and third-sector organisations?**

Authorities and organisations generally report a tremendous need for interventions aimed at people who sell sex. However, the degree to which these individuals actually feel that they need help and support varies. Many in the group suffer from complex problems, such as co-morbidities or social vulnerability. And when it comes to the target group's own experiences in their encounters with authorities, the survey shows major shortcomings. The respondents reported the highest level of satisfaction with the treatment they received from specialized organisations and activities that work specifically with sex for compensation. Respondents reported the worst treatment from the Swedish Migration Agency, the Swedish Public Employment Service and the courts. Many report experiences of stigmatization, discrimination and a general lack of knowledge among professionals.

A majority of the people in the survey who have personal experience with sex for compensation express a need for support. The greatest need among this group seems to be the establishment of contact with a psychologist/therapist/counsellor, as well as help accessing tests for HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. In the interviews, respondents highlighted the importance of tailored support based on individual needs and conditions. Some of the organisations and activities interviewed particularly highlight the need for preventive efforts and better support for children who are exposed to sexual exploitation. Several of the individuals with first-hand experiences of exposure to sexual abuse for payment as children report that they encountered attitudes of blaming and that their experiences were made invisible by the adult world. The image of "sex as self-injury" risks reducing experiences of violence to a behavioural problem in the individual.

The study also shows that access to specialized support for individuals in prostitution, or individuals who are victims of human trafficking for sexual purposes, is unevenly distributed across Sweden. There is also a lack of a coherent strategy at the national level to address this issue. There is a call for a greater number of specialized clinics, but above all, respondents highlight the importance of increasing knowledge within ordinary social services and health care activities. There is also a general perception that directives regarding who is responsible for offering interventions to the target group are unclear, and many feel that an individual's access to help is largely dependent on the knowledge and interest of the individual caseworker.

Several of the organisations/authorities suggest that a routine screening should be done to detect exposure to sexual exploitation within, for example, social services and health care. They also highlight the importance of outreach efforts, online support, low-threshold activities, information about rights, and opportunities to access representation. One factor that the target group themselves describe as

central is that any support offered must be unconditional, meaning, for example that individuals should not be required to be drug free to receive help.

Other needs that are highlighted are access to trauma care, awareness-raising efforts and clearer guidelines and routines for working with people who have been involved with sex for compensation. Respondents also highlighted the particularly vulnerable situation of migrants, as well as knowledge deficits in relation to human trafficking and EU migrants within the ordinary social services.

### **3.2. THE IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC**

#### **3.2.1. Shifting manifestations of prostitution and the work of authorities**

The pandemic has had a direct impact on the target group, which is evident in the regional coordinators' annual reports, in the interviews conducted within the framework of the survey and in the inter-agency discussions that the Swedish Gender Equality Agency has conducted.

At the beginning of the pandemic, the Swedish Gender Equality Agency received signals from municipal institutions and regional coordinators who encounter vulnerable people in their work that the number of men who buy sexual services had decreased. At the same time, the municipal institutions reported that more women had fallen back into prostitution as a result of losing their jobs or reduced income.

The border police also reported that during the pandemic, new groups of people were travelling in from countries with stricter lockdown measures. There is also suspicion of human trafficking in relation to the movements of these groups.

In some regions, the redistribution of police resources during the pandemic led to more targeted efforts to combat prostitution and human trafficking, while other regions have instead reduced the resources allocated to this effort. Some planned outreach efforts from social services and the police were shelved, and fewer individuals were offered help as a result. In their collaboration with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the regional coordinators sometimes found it difficult to offer adequate support in the repatriation process due to barriers to entry and the shut-down of support activities in the home countries.

Furthermore, there have reportedly been difficulties within the health care system in terms of performing COVID testing for women in prostitution who travel through the country and who have symptoms of COVID-19. This has led to an increased risk of the spread of infection. The lack of established routines to schedule testing for people without Swedish personal identity numbers is one reason for this gap in testing.

### **3.2.2. Focus on children – effects of the pandemic**

As the ability to travel has been severely limited during the pandemic, the police have noted that the number of cases of sexual abuse of children committed by Swedish men abroad has decreased.

At the same time, the online activity of perpetrators has increased, both in relation to activity aimed at children inside and outside of Sweden. Due to the pandemic, many children have been unable to participate in school and leisure activities to the same extent as before the pandemic and have thus spent more time online where they are at risk of falling victim to sexual exploitation. During the pandemic, many children have also had a weaker safety net in terms of access to adults who can detect signals of exposure. This has been confirmed in a report from Europol (Europol, 2020).<sup>6</sup> Children's vulnerability is discussed further in section 4.3.

### **3.3. INTER-AGENCY COOPERATION AND INITIATIVES**

As part of its assignment, the Swedish Gender Equality Agency has been tasked with presenting good practice examples of initiatives and inter-agency cooperation in matters concerning children and young people and adults who are exploited in prostitution or human trafficking. The assignment also included surveying local and regional initiatives aimed at this group and the group that buys sexual services. The questionnaire survey and the dialogue and cooperation meetings revealed a number of examples of well-functioning cooperation between authorities and effective initiatives in the area. The regional coordinators' annual reports also contain useful information. Below are some examples of regional and local initiatives and inter-agency cooperation that the Swedish Gender Equality Agency has identified as particularly significant.

#### **3.3.1. Inter-agency cooperation**

##### **Cooperation at the national level**

The Swedish Gender Equality Agency has a clear coordination role in the area of prostitution and human trafficking. In order to strengthen the work on behalf of children, young people and adults who are exploited in prostitution and human trafficking, and to make this work more targeted, effective and long-term, a well-functioning inter-agency cooperation between authorities is needed.

The Swedish Gender Equality Agency is working to address these issues in several ongoing assignments.

---

<sup>6</sup> [European Migrant Smuggling Centre 4th Annual Report – 2020 \(europol.europa.eu\)](https://www.europol.europa.eu/annual-reports/2020)

In the assignment *Ökad upptäckt av våld (Improved detection of violence)* (A2019/01517/JÄM)<sup>7</sup>, the Swedish Gender Equality Agency is collaborating with the National Board of Health and Welfare, the Swedish Public Employment Service, the Swedish Social Insurance Agency and the Swedish Migration Agency in order to create the conditions to better detect individuals who are subjected to violence or who are subjecting others to violence. Routines and manuals are jointly developed so that staff who work directly with clients can address the violence. The assignment has also included awareness-raising efforts concerning the sexual exploitation of children, prostitution, and human trafficking.

The Swedish Gender Equality Agency is also responsible for offering training initiatives and knowledge support to teachers and leadership at universities and colleges in matters relating to men's violence against women and violence in close relationships (S2018/01831/JÄM (partial)).<sup>8</sup> The agency has therefore worked in close cooperation with a number of universities and colleges. The assignment also includes matters related to honour-related violence and oppression, child marriage and forced marriage, female genital mutilation, violence against children, prostitution and human trafficking for sexual purposes and the exposure of LGBTQI people to violence in intimate relationships. The Department of Social Work at the University of Gothenburg offers the course "Teaching about prostitution and human trafficking for sexual purposes".

The Swedish Gender Equality Agency coordinates the operational network, the National Method Support Team (NMT). A number of authorities cooperate in this work and continuously engage in experience exchange. During the assignment, the themes of the meetings held with NMT have included support and protection for children, as well as the link between honour-related violence, prostitution and human trafficking.

### **Collaboration on the regional and local level**

#### **The regional coordinators**

The regional coordinators against prostitution and human trafficking are consistently highlighted as an important resource in this area of work. They are also an important resource in the work conducted by a number of authorities, and various authorities rely on the coordinators in their day-to-day routines. The regional coordinators are part of the regional method support groups, RMS (which are described in more detail below) and in the county administrative boards' collaboration groups/resource teams.

---

<sup>7</sup> [Uppdrag att planera för utökad samverkan i frågor om förbättrad upptäckt av våld i nära relationer m.m. \[Assignment to plan for increased cooperation in matters of improved detection of violence in close relationships\]. PDF 184 kB \(regeringen.se\)](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Amendment 25/06/2020 Authorities Swedish Gender Equality Agency Swedish National Financial Management Authority \(esv.se\)](#)

Regional coordinators can also play a role in making crime victims visible when the police or other authorities carry out supervision or crackdowns. They can inform crime victims and people who buy sexual services about the support measures they are entitled to and ensure that support functions are activated.

Regional coordinators collaborate with municipalities to create local action plans to combat prostitution and human trafficking, as well as to train government officials.

All regions in Sweden currently have regional coordinators who contribute to increased detection and enable support for victims of prostitution and human trafficking. The number of identified cases of suspected human trafficking has increased in the regions where services have been introduced, which shows that the regional coordinators fill an important role in this area. In 2021, new services will be established in several regions.

The Swedish Gender Equality Agency has developed a common job description for the regional coordinators, as well as a cooperation and funding model. The increased government funding allocated to Swedish Gender Equality Agency in connection with the spring amendment budget 2021 enabled a temporary increase in the support available for the regional coordinators' work. The agency has called for cooperation meetings with relevant municipalities in order to exchange experiences on how the funds can be used to strengthen ongoing work in the regions.

### **The work of the county administrative boards**

The county administrative boards are tasked with preventing and combating prostitution and human trafficking at the regional level. They play a particularly important role in regional development work, for example, by facilitating cooperation between different actors and developing preventive efforts. They also offer competence and method support, as well as other awareness-raising efforts directed at, for example, authorities, municipalities, and third-sector organisations.

Within the framework of their assignment, the county administrative boards are responsible for coordinating regional collaboration groups and regional resource teams to combat prostitution and human trafficking. The regional collaboration groups serve both as an operational and strategic resource for promoting and streamlining cooperation between regional actors working to combat prostitution and human trafficking. They also direct and develop the work to combat prostitution and human trafficking at the county level. The collaboration groups include the Swedish Police Authority, the Public Prosecutor's Office, the Swedish Prosecution Authority, the health care sector, social services and municipal support activities (for example Mika and BOSS clinics or the Support Center for Crime Victims). Several county administrative boards have also arranged regional conferences in collaboration with the civil society organisations Unizon and Talita, which have had a tremendous impact.



### **Regional method support (RMS groups)**

Regional method support, the RMS groups, constitute the operational part of the government mission to counter fraud, violations, and crime in working life (A2017/02422/ARM, A2017/00678/ARM).<sup>9</sup> The groups are managed by the Swedish Work Environment Authority. In certain high-risk industries, authorities carry out inter-agency workplace inspections to promote healthy and fair conditions in the labour market.

Today, there are RMS groups in all seven of Sweden's police regions. The groups include representatives from eight authorities: The Swedish Tax Agency, the Swedish Work Environment Authority, the Swedish Migration Agency, the Swedish Social Insurance Agency, the Swedish Public Employment Agency, the Economic Crime Authority, the Swedish Police Authority and the Swedish Gender Equality Agency. The Swedish Gender Equality Agency has contributed to the RMS Groups' work, in part by making people exposed to prostitution and human trafficking visible. The identification of potentially vulnerable people and activation of the existing support and protection processes are now integral parts of the agency's work. The Swedish Gender Equality Agency has also provided training to a large proportion of the country's workplace inspectors in these matters and has been particularly focused here on raising awareness of multiple forms of exploitation.

### **ThaiWise – an example of a Civil Society and public partnership**

ThaiWise is a project created within the framework of an idea-driven Public Partnership (IOP) between the city of Malmö and the civil society organisation Noomi - Hela Människan. The project is run with the support of a city grant from the Swedish Gender Equality Agency. The purpose of the project is to raise awareness among Thai women working in the massage industry about their rights and the support and assistance initiatives available to them. Studies show that this group is at a particularly high risk of being exposed to prostitution and human trafficking, as well as labour exploitation. The project includes cooperation between various parts of the administration and the regional coordinator against human trafficking and the civil society organisation.

The initiatives carried out within the project are planned and coordinated through a working group consisting of representatives from Noomi, the city of Malmö (the labour market and social administration, the environmental administration and integration and housing) and Evonhuset, which provides support, counselling and

---

<sup>9</sup> [Uppdrag om fortsatt myndighetssamverkan för att motverka fusk, regelöverträdelser och brottslighet i arbetslivet \[Assignment for continued inter-agency collaboration to fight work-related crime\]. PDF 125 kB \(regeringen.se\)](#)

practical help for those who buy sex, those who sell sex and their relatives. The collaboration also includes representatives from the Thai Embassy in Sweden and the Swedish Embassy in Thailand. There is also a reference group whose members include women from the target group, who play a major role in the operational work and also participate in decision-making processes in the working group.

As a result of this collaboration, the regional coordinators have drawn up a checklist in cases of suspected human trafficking to identify vulnerable individuals/victims so they can be offered support and protection. The checklist is used by environmental and health protection inspectors and the Swedish Work Environment Authority's inspectors during workplace inspections.

### **3.3.2. Initiatives in the area**

#### **National initiatives**

##### **Swedish Platform – Civil Society against Human Trafficking**

The Swedish Platform – Civil Society against Human Trafficking brings together organisations and other civil society actors who encounter or explicitly work to help those exposed to human trafficking and human trafficking-like exploitation.

The platform operates a national support programme for individuals exposed to prostitution and human trafficking as a complement to the public activities that offer support efforts to victims. Since the spring of 2021, the national support programme has been funded by the Swedish Gender Equality Agency.

#### **Regional and local level**

##### **Clinics for buyers of sexual services (BOSS).**

BOSS clinics are currently available in Stockholm, Gothenburg, Malmö (Evonhuset), Karlstad, Umeå, Västerås, Skellefteå, Luleå and Östersund. In several parts of the country, there are currently active discussions about opening additional clinics. The clinics, which are part of the social services in each municipality, offer interventions for purchasers of sexual services and individuals who have problems with compulsive or destructive sexual behaviour. All are welcome regardless of gender, including couples. Those who turn to BOSS clinics for help are predominantly men, and they do so on their own initiative or in connection with an arrest related to the purchase of sexual services. The BOSS clinics offer conversational therapy and treatment to break patterns of destructive sexual behaviours.

### **Mika clinics**

The Mika clinics are aimed at people who have been exposed to prostitution or human trafficking, as well as people who feel that they are “harming themselves with sex”. The majority of their clients are women. The clinics also offer support sessions with relatives. Mika clinics are currently available in four locations in Sweden: Stockholm and Gothenburg, and since 2021, Borås. In Malmö, a similar support service is offered through Evonhuset.

In Stockholm, the Mika clinic is co-located with Mikahälsa, which offers support from professionals including midwives, gynaecologists, psychiatrists, and psychologists.

In Gothenburg, the Mika clinic has developed a treatment model that has yielded good treatment results. Participants have reportedly increased their quality of life significantly, found gainful employment, improved their relationships, and increased their trust in society and individuals. The clinic’s work is described as relational and long-term and includes trauma care. Collaboration with, and the involvement of other professionals is part of the clinic's work. This includes cooperation with authorities, psychiatric care, labour market measures, health care, housing assistance and sheltered housing.

### **Regionalization of BOSS/MIKA**

In the Stockholm region, a project is underway to regionalize the BOSS and Mika clinics, which also includes the regional coordinators. The purpose of the project is to ensure that people exposed to prostitution and human trafficking, as well as people who buy sexual services, get access to qualitative, equal support regardless of where in they live in the region. Previously, the clinics have only carried out their work in the city of Stockholm. The project is continuing through 2021, and the hope is for collaboration agreements to be signed with more municipalities in the region.

### **Other clinics**

Several regions also offer other types of region-specific initiatives. One example is the Emergency Clinic for Rape Victims at Södersjukhuset in Stockholm and a similar clinic at Sahlgrenska University Hospital in Gothenburg. In the Västra Götaland Region, there is the Sexualmedicinskt centrum – Pilen, which specialises in sexual health and serving the vulnerable/victims. The target group for the clinic includes individuals who are sexually vulnerable.

### **3.3.3. Focus on children – inter-agency cooperation and initiatives**

Cooperation targeting children who are exposed to exploitation, prostitution and human trafficking is currently underway between many different authorities and at different levels of government.

#### **The regional coordinators**

In the dialogue with authorities and the responses to the questionnaire, one thing that stands out is the regional coordinators' method development work in relation to outreach efforts, for example, in cases of suspected begging and sexual exploitation. The development work includes the establishment of lines of communication to assist social workers who work with unaccompanied children in other municipalities in order to be able to quickly notify relevant actors that children are in transit to another municipality, so that the young person shows up on their radar at an early stage. Many actors have emphasized the importance of cooperation in cases like these, which involve multiple municipalities. There is also development work being carried out that targets vulnerable children from other EU countries, where cooperation between the regional coordinator, embassies and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs ensures that these children will receive the support they need within a reasonable timeframe based on their individual needs.

In the Stockholm region, there is currently a regional coordinator whose work focuses specifically on children and young people. The regional coordinator engages in targeted outreach efforts to reach children, which includes cooperation with the police. As a result of this targeted effort, significantly more children and young people who have been exposed to exploitation are being identified compared to other regions. This in turn means that more children and young people are offered the support and protection they need. In Stockholm, there are also social workers whose work focuses specifically on young people who are exposed to sexual exploitation.

After the increase in government funding allocated to Swedish Gender Equality Agency in connection with the spring amendment budget, the Swedish Gender Equality Agency has been able to further reinforce the work of the regional coordinators. The agency has recommended that the municipalities use the funds for work that targets vulnerable children and young people.

#### **Preventive efforts**

Several authorities have also highlighted the PrevenTell helpline as an important part of the work to prevent prostitution and human trafficking. PrevenTell is a national helpline for those who feel they have lost control of their sexual behaviour and is run by Karolinska University Hospital.

### **Barnahus**

A number of Sweden's municipalities have special centres called Barnahus, which is an example of a well-functioning inter-agency collaboration for children exposed to sexual exploitation and human trafficking. Barnahus serves as a central location where police, prosecutors, doctors, social services and staff from child and adolescent psychiatry (BUP) can meet with vulnerable children. The purpose of Barnahus is to create a centralized, child-friendly environment where children can meet with various professionals. When there is a suspicion that a child has been the victim of a crime, the professionals described above engage in an interdisciplinary consultation to prepare the support that the child may need. A number of actors have highlighted Barnahus as a success story with the conditions needed to collectively strengthen the work to ensure that children who are exposed to exploitation receive the support they need.

In 2020–2021, the Council of the Baltic Sea States carried out a joint project with Barnahus to investigate whether they can improve the identification of children exposed to exploitation and human trafficking and include this target group in their activities to a greater extent. The work resulted in the report *In need of target support – The role of Barnahus in identification and investigation on child trafficking and the support and assistance provided to victims* (Finch, N. & O'Donnell, R., 2021). The report was presented in June 2021. The Council of the Baltic Sea States will continue this work in the autumn of 2021. The plan is for Barnahus to take a more direct role in working with the target group so that more vulnerable young people can be identified and offered support. The Swedish Gender Equality Agency is a partner in this collaborative project.

### **Screening tools**

Other efforts aimed at increasing the identification of children include the use of adapted screening tools. The Knowledge Center for Sexual Health in Västra Götaland has developed a screening tool, SEXIT, for the increased detection of victims of exploitation and prostitution. SEXIT is used by organisations that encounter young people in their work, for example, youth clinics, student health teams and child and adolescent psychiatry.

### **EU-level cooperation**

The Swedish Gender Equality Agency is currently participating in an EU project concerning unaccompanied children in Europe. The project has been initiated by the French Ministry of Justice, and in addition to the Swedish Gender Equality Agency, it includes representatives from Italy and Spain. The purpose of the project is to increase our knowledge of how children move between countries and where countries can turn to find common guidelines with good practice examples and working methods to prevent children from ending up in situations where they are vulnerable and exposed to various forms of exploitation.

### **Support activities for children and young people**

Several municipal and regional support activities, as well as a number of civil society organisations, are especially aimed at children and young people who are exposed to exploitation, prostitution and human trafficking.

There are a number of specialized units in the country where vulnerable people can turn for support. In Stockholm, vulnerable individuals, and victims under the age of 18 can get help at the Support Centre for Crime Victims, where phone support and other support services are offered. Anyone over the age of 15 who is exposed to prostitution is welcome at Evonhuset in Malmö. In Gothenburg, the Mika clinic also accepts children. Children and young people can also turn to the Support Center for Crime Victims in Gothenburg. The Sexualmedicinskt centrum in Gothenburg (SMC-Pilen) offers support, including counselling and testing.

Specialized clinics are also available in other locations in Sweden. Children and young people also receive care through primary care, child and adolescent psychiatry, youth clinics and the regular activities of social services.

Some of the initiatives offered by civil society organisations are described here:

The City Mission (Stadsmissionen) offers activities with a focus on unaccompanied children to combat sexual exploitation. In order to reach children and build trust, the City Mission offers, among other things, reading assistance.

RFSL Ungdom, the Swedish Youth Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) Rights, welcomes people of all genders and gender identities. Their special competence concerning young LGBTQ people is extremely valuable. RFSL runs Pegasus, a support chat aimed at LGBTQI people who have encountered, or have concerns about, sexual exploitation.

In addition to the website, ECPAT Hotline (a website where people can anonymously report suspected sexual abuse of children), since March 2020, ECPAT has been running a special support line for children under the age of 18. The support line is called Ditt ECPAT and provides information on rights, advice, support and a takedown feature for nude photographs that are shared against a child's will. Ditt ECPAT provides a safe space for children to chat, call or email about anything to do with images, sexual abuse, threats, and abuse and get answers from lawyers, sociologists and psychologists.

Ellencentret is part of the third-sector foundation, 1000 Opportunities and offers help, advice and therapy for young people between the ages of 15 and 25 who are sexually vulnerable, including those who have been exposed to sexual exploitation, regardless of gender or gender identity. 1000 Opportunities, which has worked with the target group since 2010, operates Ellencentret's activities online and through their national chat helpline. The Ellencentret offers anonymous support free of charge via their chat, individual conversational therapy or group therapy and treatment at their clinic in Stockholm.

### 3.4. METHOD SUPPORT AND COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT

The agency's assignment includes gathering and disseminating knowledge and support materials to support professionals in their work with children and young people and adults who are being exploited, or are at risk of being exploited, in prostitution or human trafficking, as well as exploring how preventive work aimed at the group who buys sexual services can be implemented. As needed, the agency shall also offer training initiatives to professionals who encounter children and young people and adults who are being exploited, or are at risk of being exploited, in prostitution or human trafficking and/or people who exploit this group.

#### 3.4.1. Methodological support

##### **National Referral Mechanism – A support and protection process for victims of trafficking in human beings in Sweden**

The Swedish Gender Equality Agency has revised the National Referral Mechanism (NRM). The NRM has been distributed to professionals through the county administrative boards around the country. It was also distributed digitally during the conference arranged by the Swedish Gender Equality Agency in connection with the 20-year anniversary of the passing of the Sex Purchase Act. The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SKR) has distributed the NRM and the Swedish Gender Equality Agency's online training against sexual exploitation, prostitution and human trafficking through its extensive network.

##### **Information material**

Reports and information videos produced in the work to combat labour exploitation have been distributed via the Swedish Gender Equality Agency's channels such as NMT, the county administrative boards and other authorities such as the Swedish Work Environment Authority.

The Swedish Gender Equality Agency has also distributed a brochure via the county administrative boards' network about the important work the regional coordinators do.

Resekurage, an annual campaign run by the Swedish Gender Equality Agency in collaboration with ECPAT and Childhood, had to be put on hold due to the pandemic. It was assessed that during a pandemic with international travel advisories and restrictions, a campaign aimed at the travel industry was simply not relevant. When travel restrictions are lifted, we plan to resume the campaign.

During the period, a larger campaign, Tillsammans Mot Våld (Together Against Violence), was carried out by the Swedish Gender Equality Agency and the county administrative boards. The campaign focused on COVID-19 and exposure to violence, including prostitution and human trafficking.

### **The campaign “Vem är polare, vem är groomare?” (“Who’s a friend, who’s a groomer?”).**

The Swedish Gender Equality Agency has identified a need to increase awareness of the sexual exploitation of children and young people online. As a result of the pandemic, many children and young people spent more time online. Perpetrators are known to seek out platforms that children and young people use. In order to draw attention to the sexual exploitation of children and young people online, the Swedish Gender Equality Agency has developed a campaign on grooming called “Vem är polare, vem är groomare?” (“Who is a friend, who is a groomer?”). The campaign aims to prevent and combat the sexual abuse of children and young people online, by encouraging and supporting parents and adults in children and young people’s lives to talk to children about what they do on the internet.

The campaign was launched in June 2021 and was targeted to social media platforms. The Swedish Gender Equality Agency's website has a pillar page with information and concrete tips on what parents and adults can do, things adults should consider in conversations with children and young people, and where they can turn for support and assistance if something does happen.

### **The Swedish Gender Equality Agency's website**

The Swedish Gender Equality Agency's website has been developed, including the National Coordination Against Prostitution and Trafficking in Human Beings. The guiding principle for the development work is partly to collect the agency's current websites under one roof, and partly to create a website that better serves the visitor’s needs within the agency’s areas of responsibility.

One goal of the project is to build the foundation so that jämställdhetsmyndigheten.se can become a digital hub for information about gender equality and tools for gender equality efforts, including prostitution and human trafficking for all purposes. The intention is for the website to be a go-to resource for professionals working in government agencies and other actors, for civil society organisations and an accessible resource for the general public. The site aims to clarify the Swedish Gender Equality Agency's goals and assignments through its ease of use, uniformity, inclusiveness and accessibility.

During the feasibility study, potential synergies between websites and across the websites’ structure, as well as the website’s role in the agency's strategic communication, were investigated. One result of the analysis was the integration of the NMT website with jämställdhetsmyndigheten.se. The agency also identified a need to collect its own material and others' material on prostitution and human trafficking for all purposes on the Swedish Gender Equality Agency’s website. This information shall be a comprehensive and relevant resource for professionals in the field. The website is to contain in-depth information, as well as news and current events. The website shall contribute to the Swedish Gender Equality



Agency's goal of being the go-to hub in the agency's work to combat prostitution and human trafficking. Material that will be found on the site includes methodological support for professionals, checklists, links to the agency's own and others' training programmes, tools for teaching and useful screening tools.

The dissemination of certain material has already begun. The work to incorporate all relevant material and links is a more complicated process, which will continue during the autumn. The new website will be launched later in the autumn.

### **3.4.2. Preventive work**

The agency's assignment includes efforts to reach professionals in the field by gathering and disseminating knowledge and support material about how to effectively implement preventive work that targets those who purchase sexual services.

In the questionnaire portion of the study carried out within the scope of this assignment, the Swedish Gender Equality Agency included a question relating to the awareness of preventive work or initiatives aimed at those who purchase sexual services.

In terms of the question about efforts to counteract the demand for sexual services, a number of campaigns are highlighted, as well as the "action weeks" where police aim to prevent and reduce the purchase of sexual services.

For the question about efforts to prevent the commercialization and exploitation of the female body in pornography linked to prostitution and human trafficking, respondents point to the work carried out by the Civil Society Organisations ROKS (the National Organisation for Women's Shelters and Young Women's Shelters in Sweden), Unizon Talita and Porrfri Barndom (Porn-free Childhood). Talita's material, Reality Check, which aims to counteract the harmful effects of pornography, was also highlighted. The answers also speak to the tremendous impact of the county administrative boards' regional conferences in collaboration with Unizon and Talita.

Many respondents point to BOSS, namely, the support and treatment offered to people who buy sexual services, as key actors in the preventive work. The BOSS clinics offer treatment to people who purchase sexual services, with the ultimate aim of preventing the purchase of sexual services and reduction of harm on an individual level.

In the extensive survey performed in the agency's assignment, representatives from BOSS point to the importance of preventive efforts in the form of sex education and challenging the destructive effects of masculine norms, as well as the importance of campaigns that raise awareness of prostitution and human trafficking for sexual purposes.

In summary, during its work to investigate preventive efforts, the Swedish Gender Equality Agency has identified several methods and approaches that can be useful, though few of these have been thoroughly evaluated. A few of the methods will be disseminated through the Swedish Equality Agency's own channels. One example is Parkgömmet, which is an educational game for children which aims to prevent grooming and is intended for use in teaching activities. The purpose of the game is to increase risk awareness among children, particularly when it comes to grooming.

### **Evaluation of treatment methods for purchasers of sexual services**

Gothenburg Region's unit for research and development, FoU i Väst, has performed an evaluation of the BOSS clinic in Gothenburg on behalf of the Swedish Gender Equality Agency and the County Administrative Board of Västra Götaland. The study is attached to this final report.<sup>10</sup> The purpose of the study was to survey how the work with purchasers of sexual services is conducted and the perceived efficacy of the treatment.

To investigate which psychosocial interventions are offered to people who purchase sex, FoU i Väst initially performed a limited literature review of material on purchasers of sexual services. The search showed that research in the area is very limited. There is also a lack of systematic follow-up that looks at activities or the effectiveness of interventions. Activities such as BOSS, where people can seek help on their own initiative, are mainly only found in Sweden.

The evaluation of working methods and treatment methods, the clients' experience of treatment and the effect of the treatment show that the clinic's clients are generally very satisfied and feel that the treatment has improved their lives. They have also stopped or reduced their purchase of sexual services.

However, the population is too small to draw general conclusions about the methods and the efficacy of the treatment. The Swedish Gender Equality Agency has therefore initiated a national evaluation of additional BOSS operations in collaboration with several county administrative boards. The evaluation will be carried out by researchers at the University of Gothenburg and is expected to last for several years.

### **Literature overview regarding preventive efforts**

During its work to identify preventive efforts, the Swedish Gender Equality Agency has found that there are few preventive methods that have been evaluated to determine their efficacy. The Swedish Gender Equality Agency has therefore initiated a broad research survey with a focus on evaluated methods to prevent

---

<sup>10</sup> [Psykosociala insatser till köpare av sexuella tjänster \(goteborgsregionen.se\)](https://psykosociala.insatser.till.kopare.av.sexuella.tjanster.goteborgsregionen.se)

sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children, as well as prostitution and human trafficking for sexual purposes. The purpose of this literature review is to identify more methods and working methods that can be applied effectively in Sweden.

The survey covers research published in the years 2014–2021. In the survey, systematic searches have been carried out by information experts at the University Library at Malmö University, together with expert investigators at the Swedish Gender Equality Agency. Searches have been performed in both national and international databases. The survey includes research, studies and reports on evaluated methods and working methods used in preventive work on a universal and selective level. The survey also includes research on evaluated psychosocial support and treatment methods (so-called indicated prevention). The search resulted in 1,521 unique articles. After a review of all abstracts, 154 articles have been identified for assessment and closer review in full text form. The work of reading and analysing the texts is currently in progress.

The results so far have revealed the following: Only 5 percent of the articles cover prostitution, while 15 percent focus on human trafficking for sexual purposes. Very few articles cover preventive efforts to combat prostitution. The reading of the articles that include preventive efforts to combat the sexual abuse of children shows, however, that there are a number of interventions in the area that have been evaluated in terms of efficacy. These mainly include school-based programmes, but they also include online training and education, computer games, mobile apps and children's books. An overwhelming majority of the evaluated interventions share similar components, which are primarily based on the notion that children should learn to recognize the grooming strategies used by perpetrators, what constitutes inappropriate touching, how they can protect themselves against abusers and how to speak up and tell adults about abuse if it occurs. There are also two examples of evaluated preventive efforts where the work to prevent sexual abuse against children included the mobilization of local communities in more comprehensive, municipality-wide initiatives.

Only a few studies concern preventive efforts that specifically target demand and offenders. These efforts mainly highlight the importance of knowledge- and attitude-changing efforts to reduce the stigma around paedophilic arousal patterns in order to get people in the risk group to seek help *before* they are at risk of committing abuse. Examples include media campaigns, anonymous helplines, therapeutic treatments and awareness-raising efforts to reduce the stigma among therapists. In 2021, a first-of-its-kind research article was also published regarding a school-based prevention programme which, instead of focusing on exposure, aims to prevent young people from *carrying out* abuse against younger children.

The results of the mapping literature review will be published in their entirety at a later date.

### 3.4.3. Competence development

#### Training opportunity

The Swedish Gender Equality Agency conducted basic training for professionals in the field which covered prostitution and human trafficking, as well as the support and protection process for victims of human trafficking in Sweden. For the training, the agency also produced work material linked to the National Referral Mechanism. The training was designed for professionals working in the field. Course participants included representatives from the Swedish Police Authority, the Swedish Migration Agency, the Swedish Tax Agency, as well as professionals working in the social services, health care sector, law firms and civil society organisations. Work has also been initiated to develop in-depth training and methodological support for professionals based on the Swedish Gender Equality Agency's National Referral Mechanism on human trafficking.

The regional coordinators against prostitution and human trafficking have been provided with an introduction by the Swedish Gender Equality Agency so that they can lead group exercises based on the work material. The material will be supplemented with fictitious scenarios to illustrate different forms of exploitation, as well as an educational video. The regional coordinators also participate in various training initiatives which have been adapted to regional needs.

Within the part assignment relating to labour exploitation, several trainings have been held to get information to the Swedish Work Environment Authority's inspectors. The training effort aims to raise awareness of the problems the inspectors may encounter during their work. A video of the training has been recorded so that it can be distributed in digital form throughout the country.

In 2021, all workplace inspectors are required to have completed the training.

#### New online training

The Swedish Gender Equality Agency has identified significant knowledge gaps regarding the sexual exploitation of children, prostitution and human trafficking, and at the same time, more and more professionals are seeking knowledge in the area. The agency therefore set out to develop an online training within the assignment, which also covers the entire subject area. The online training aims to reach more professional groups who encounter children, young people and adults who have been exploited or are at risk of being exploited in prostitution or human trafficking. The training is free of charge and can be accessed on the Swedish Gender Equality Agency's website. It is primarily intended for professionals who work with the target groups, but is also suitable for the media, students, Civil Society Organisations and the general public. The goal of the online training is to increase the basic level of knowledge among professionals across several different professions.

The online training is divided into five parts. The first part provides basic knowledge of the area in question and Sweden's strategy to address the issues. This is followed by three parts that focus on the topics: the sexual exploitation of children, prostitution and human trafficking. The training includes a review of legislation, texts, videos, and audio reports with experts working within various government agencies, support activities and civil society organisations that work with issues related to the sexual exploitation of children, prostitution and human trafficking. There are also several fictitious scenarios based on the experiences of the target group. The fifth part provides concrete tips for professionals, including important things to consider when encountering people who have been exploited in prostitution or human trafficking, tips for identifying people who have been exploited and actions professionals should take when they do encounter the population.

The online training was launched in June 2021. The online training will also be used within the government assignment [Assisting the National Board of Health and Welfare regarding competence support for violence in intimate relationships (S202/01591/SOF/(in part))]. The National Board of Health and Welfare provides a link to the training on *Kunskapsguiden (Knowledge guide)*.<sup>11</sup>

#### **3.4.4. Focus on children – method support and competence development**

The Swedish Gender Equality Agency's National Referral Mechanism contains information on what actions authorities should take in cases where children are vulnerable or exposed. The agency has identified other methodological support tools, such as the above-mentioned game Parkgömmet, which will be available on the agency's revamped website.

The agency's online training on sexual exploitation, prostitution and human trafficking has a special focus on children. The campaign "Vem är polare, vem är groomare?" ("Who's a friend, who's a groomer?") is also specifically aimed at people who encounter children and young people, including both professionals and parents.

The literature review that has been initiated shows that there is some existing research on support and treatment for girls and boys who have been exposed to sexual exploitation, but very few articles that cover preventive work.

---

<sup>11</sup> <https://kunskapsguiden.se/>

## **4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

In this chapter, the Swedish Gender Equality Agency presents its analysis and conclusions from the survey and the agency's work within the framework of the assignment. The chapter ends with a look forward, which is collected in point form.

### **4.1. THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTINUOUSLY SURVEYING THE EXTENT OF PROSTITUTION**

Regular surveys that examine the extent of a phenomenon are very valuable, partly because they allow us to track developments and changes over time, but above all, because they allow us to offer effective, qualified, and well-adapted support to different groups based on the range of needs in the target population. The knowledge presented in the survey can also be used in preventive work. In previous surveys, the focus has mainly been on measuring and estimating the extent and distribution of the phenomenon, as well as surveying relevant actors. This survey included both voices from those exposed to prostitution and purchasers of sexual services. The inclusion of both groups provides a deeper understanding of the problem and can help complement other data.

The extent of prostitution and human trafficking for sexual purposes and, above all, the forms in which it manifests, are influenced by changes in society in general. This is one aspect that has become very clear when conducting this survey, not least considering the rapid growth of apps and various web-based platforms for the sale of sexual services, as well as the impact of the pandemic. It is therefore important that this type of survey is done repeatedly, at regular intervals that are short enough to capture significant changes.

This survey has been carried out based on the recommendations of the National Board of Health and Welfare. However, another thing that has become clear during the survey is that the methods used to measure the extent of prostitution can be improved further.

One way to achieve this may be to include questions about vulnerability and exposure in more studies and to create guidelines for collecting statistics within different activities and organisations so that data can be compared more easily. Continuous, coherent method development work, on the national level, would help improve the foundation on which future surveys will be based.

## 4.2. NEW ARENAS AND MANIFESTATIONS REQUIRE NEW APPROACHES

In recent decades, the biggest single factor that has impacted which arenas are used for prostitution is the explosion of information and communication technology. The Internet is now by far the most dominant arena for prostitution. Today, a large proportion of the contacts made between victims of prostitution and those who purchase sexual services are made through a wide variety of websites. This trend has only increased during the pandemic. The results from the survey show that as a result of the pandemic, more and more people who were previously involved in street prostitution are instead exploited via digital arenas, such as the website Onlyfans or through webcams. It was also revealed that many people use multiple arenas simultaneously to bring in money.

Another clear trend is that contact is not only being made on websites intended for this purpose, but that the catchment area has been expanded to include dating sites, social media, apps and even games. A relatively new phenomenon called “sugar dating” is also a growing trend. As a result of these shifts, it has become easier for perpetrators to come into contact with potentially vulnerable people.

These channels are also used extensively by young people, making them especially vulnerable to people who want to make contact specifically to exploit young people. Among the vulnerable adults who participated in the survey, many reported that they had been exposed to grooming when they were younger, which was often considered to be a contributing factor to their exposure to sexual exploitation and continued exploitation as adults. In the survey, agencies and organisations that encounter vulnerable people report that perpetrators systematically search the internet for young, particularly vulnerable victims. Here, parents and other close people in the child’s life need to be provided with the tools needed to prepare the young person for what they may be exposed to online and how the child should respond. The Swedish Gender Equality Agency’s campaign “Vem är polare, vem är groomare?” (“Who’s a friend, who’s a groomer?”) is a direct response to this need, and parents can find support regarding how to talk to their children about grooming on the agency’s website.

The fact that most prostitution takes place online, often hidden, presents other and in some cases greater challenges. The police have been forced to develop methods for monitoring the Internet for illegal activity, which is often a prerequisite for prosecuting people who purchase sexual services. The outreach work that social services and the police carry out, sometimes together, must be adapted to the modern technological landscape. This work is complicated even further by the fact that contacts for the sale of sexual services can be made on forums where a majority of the contacts are not made with that intention.

Given the increased activity on the internet, especially activity that targets children, the crime prevention and outreach efforts carried out by the police in particular need to be intensified. It is crucial that the Swedish Police Authority implements a large-scale effort to reduce the number of people, both children and young people, who are exposed to prostitution or sexual exploitation.

The Swedish Gender Equality Agency's view is that professionals in the field have a continued and extensive need for support in matters relating to sexual exploitation and the vulnerability of young people online. This should include an inventory of the knowledge and methods that have been developed to address these issues, including the material developed by the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society (MUCF). Updated and relevant materials can then be distributed to professionals who work with children and young people.

### **4.3. THE VULNERABILITY OF YOUNG PEOPLE NEEDS TO BE MADE VISIBLE**

Multiple surveys and the Swedish Gender Equality Agency's own work clearly show that children are at greater risk than ever before of falling victim to all forms of exploitation, particularly prostitution and human trafficking. This is the result of a number of factors, including the ongoing digital transformation of modern society, where various social platforms have become an integral part of children's lives – opening the door for perpetrators to more easily make contact with children. Contact can be made through a variety of different digital arenas, for example, in the online games that children use.

And the pandemic has also had a negative impact on this trend. The Swedish Police Authority has noted that the number of sexual offences against children committed by Swedish men abroad has decreased. But at the same time, the authority notes that the online activity of perpetrators, directed at children both inside and outside of Sweden, has increased.

Due to the pandemic, many children have been unable to participate in school and leisure activities to the same extent and have thus spent more time online where they are at risk of falling victim to sexual exploitation. During the pandemic, children may also have had access to fewer adults who could detect signs of vulnerability.

Some groups of children are particularly vulnerable, including unaccompanied children, LGBTIQI people, accompanying children, children in (social) care and children and young people with neuropsychiatric disorders. Particularly vulnerable groups are covered in more detail in section 4.4.

In the most recent population study of young people's sexuality and sexual abuse and sexual exploitation among young people, it was found that 27.3 percent of



boys and 64 percent of girls in year 3 of upper secondary school who had been exposed to sexual exploitation had also been exposed to oral, vaginal or anal sexual abuse (Svedin et al., 2021).

Several of the interviewed support activities that work with victims of sexual exploitation state that they have been encountering young adults to an alarming extent. Very few of the above-mentioned activities are specifically aimed at children, but staff from Novahuset report that based on the people they come into contact with through their chat support, they can assume that exposure to sexual exploitation is “creeping down into the lower age groups”.

In the survey, adult women confirm that they were exposed to grooming and exploitation as children, but that this was not taken seriously by the authorities. Government officials have instead transferred the blame to the children themselves or dismissed what happened to them as part of being young.

In the Swedish Gender Equality Agency’s view, efforts and initiatives for children need to be strengthened. In its assignment, the Swedish Gender Equality Agency has raised these issues at meetings with the National Methodology Support Team and has also developed the campaign *Vem är polare, vem är groomare?* (“Who’s a friend, who’s a groomer?”). In addition, the agency works actively to strengthen the children's rights perspective in all parts of its operations.

School is an important part of children’s lives and everyday routines. Schools present a good opportunity to work preventively with these issues. For starters, children can be equipped with tools to deal with what they encounter online and provided with the confidence they need to talk to an adult if they have been exposed. The Swedish Gender Equality Agency contends that the issue of sexual exploitation must be a clearly represented in the new subject, *Sexuality, Consent and Relationships*. In terms of preventive methods, the Swedish Gender Equality Agency's work in the research overview identified a number of evaluated methods that can be applied in the school environment to prevent abuse and sexual violence.

In the survey, representatives from BOSS point to the importance of preventive work linked to sex education and of challenging destructive norms of masculinity. Sexual exploitation, prostitution and human trafficking for sexual purposes are clearly gendered phenomena; those who buy sex in Sweden are predominantly men. Sweden’s National Strategy to Prevent and Combat Men’s Violence Against Women emphasizes the importance of engaging boys and young men in this effort, a target group that can especially be reached in the schools.

In some regions, the work of the regional coordinators is more focused on children. The Swedish Gender Equality Agency has also noted that in these regions, a higher number of vulnerable children are identified and thus offered support and protection. In connection with the spring amendment budget, the Swedish Gender Equality Agency was tasked with further strengthening the work of the regional coordinators. Cooperation agreements have been signed between the Swedish

Gender Equality Agency, the county administrative boards and the municipalities where the regional coordinators work. Following the decision in the spring amendment budget, the Swedish Gender Equality Agency has significantly increased the government funding to the regional coordinators and has particularly emphasized the importance of using the resources to strengthen the children's perspective.

Barnahus has been highlighted as a success story, given that it has the conditions needed to collectively strengthen the work to ensure that children who are exposed to exploitation receive the support they need. The Swedish Gender Equality Agency is very encouraged by the method development work that has begun at Barnahus, which aims to identify young people who are at risk of or are exposed to sexual exploitation and offer them support. One observation that is shared by a number of the actors that the Swedish Gender Equality Agency collaborates with, including the regional coordinators, is that children exposed to sexual exploitation do not receive the support they are entitled to and that there have been cases where Barnahus did not feel that they were able to serve the target group.

Agencies and organisations whose work has a special focus on children, for example, the health care sector, social services, school and extended school, need to incorporate sexual exploitation and human trafficking in their existing routines and guidelines and to adopt effective approaches to identify and prevent sexual exploitation and human trafficking. One approach is to include questions related to this in screening forms. The form, Sexit, has been successfully used in youth clinics within Sweden.

Another important measure is to update the national action plan to combat prostitution and human trafficking by strengthening the children's rights perspective and adding a focus on particularly vulnerable groups and multiple forms of exploitation.

#### **4.4. PARTICULARLY VULNERABLE GROUPS**

The results of the survey clearly show that certain groups are particularly vulnerable. Representatives from activities and organisations that encounter vulnerable migrants in their work describe their situation in terms of "extreme vulnerability". Many of the people they encounter in their work do not have the security of having their basic human rights met. They are at greater risk of falling victim to exploitation and violence as they often lack awareness of their rights, have limited access to welfare services and do not contact authorities for fear of being deported. This group has also become even more vulnerable as a result of the pandemic.

The Swedish Platform – Civil Society against Human Trafficking often encounters migrants exposed to prostitution and human trafficking. The national support programme, which is administrated by the platform, is an important complement to regular support structures.

Another group described as particularly vulnerable are unaccompanied migrant children and young people. People in this group are described as living in extremely vulnerable conditions, as they often live in the shadows of society and depend on income from prostitution and human trafficking for their survival, to put a roof over their heads or to finance an addiction. The regional coordinators completed a method development project regarding these children.

The results of the survey show that people in social care are overrepresented in the statistics. This applies to female inmates within the Swedish Prison and Probation Service, people who receive care through the Act on Care of Addicts in Certain Cases (LVM) or young people who receive care through the Care of Young Persons Act (LVU). The National Board of Institutional Care received an assignment from the government to increase the authority's knowledge of honour-related violence and oppression, violence prevention, including destructive norms of masculinity, and prostitution and human trafficking. Here, the Swedish Gender Equality Agency contributes its expertise through the planned training initiative.

The survey also shows that vulnerability in prostitution and human trafficking is largely related to economic vulnerability, often in combination with other factors, such as poor mental health and substance abuse problems.

LGBTQI people are overrepresented among those exploited in prostitution. During the implementation of the survey, representatives of the support activity Pegasus, which is run by RFSL, have been interviewed. They report that LGBTQI people who are exposed to prostitution live with a double vulnerability, as they also violate norms regarding sexuality and/or gender identity. Men and people with trans experience are at risk of being made invisible.

One group that is not highlighted in the survey, but which has been highlighted by the regional coordinators and in the discussions with the national method support team, is accompanying children of people exposed to prostitution and human trafficking. Children are affected indirectly as relatives of the vulnerable and victims. These children may have also been witness to violence perpetrated against a parent or other relative who is exploited in prostitution or human trafficking. They are victims of crime without having the legal status as plaintiffs or witnesses in the legal process. As a group, these children may very well need extensive support and protection, but they are not always identified and do not receive the support they are entitled to.

Another problem area that has been noted among authorities that the Swedish Gender Equality Agency cooperates with is the group of people who are exposed to honour-related violence and oppression who are also exposed to prostitution and human trafficking. The Swedish Gender Equality Agency is investigating the conditions for this group in more detail in a special assignment.

#### **4.5. THE NEED FOR QUALITATIVE AND EQUAL SUPPORT ACROSS THE COUNTRY**

In the survey, researchers presented a summary of what people who were actually exposed to prostitution themselves thought good support should be; they responded: offer the support that is requested; offer support based on the right competence, knowledge, familiarity and respect for the fact that there are different experiences and different needs, and not least; the support that is offered must be anchored in the knowledge and experiences of people with first-hand experiences of exposure and vulnerability.

One resource that many respondents highlighted are specialized activities, such as the Mika clinics and BOSS clinics. The clinics offer special competence in terms of support and treatment for people who are exploited in prostitution and human trafficking or people who purchase sexual services. But these activities are mainly available in Sweden's metropolitan regions, which leads to large disparities across the country in terms of access to specialized support and imbalances in the quality of support. Stockholm County is currently in the process of regionalizing the activities it offers, which is a measure it is undertaking within the framework of the county's action plan. This structured and formalized initiative will create the conditions for a more equal distribution of support in the region.

In the interviews conducted during the survey with representatives from different authorities and organisations, it was revealed that one of the biggest obstacles to ensure that people exposed to prostitution and human trafficking for sexual purposes have their needs met is that directives regarding who is responsible for offering interventions to the target group are unclear. Unlike other target groups, the majority of the respondents with first-hand experience of prostitution and human trafficking feel that their experiences are often made invisible or perceived to fall within someone else's area of responsibility. Several respondents highlight the importance of clarifying the role of social services and psychiatric care providers, namely their responsibility for offering interventions/treatment to persons exposed to sexual exploitation, prostitution and human trafficking.

Furthermore, the majority of the activities and organisations that work with people exposed to prostitution report that a large number of the people they encounter have complex problems, co-morbidities and multiple forms of social vulnerability, and thus an extensive need for interventions from both health care providers and social services. Several of those interviewed in the survey contend that there is a lack of a functioning structure for the coordination of support, protection and care for the population in need. Several activities and organisations report that the need for trauma care is particularly difficult to meet. Several informants also highlight the importance of outreach efforts, digital support and low-threshold activities.

For its part, the Swedish Gender Equality Agency argues that the responsibilities and initiatives/interventions offered to the target groups within the health care sector need to be made visible through a new action plan.

### **4.6. EFFECTIVE MEASURES REQUIRE KNOWLEDGE AND A PROFESSIONAL APPROACH**

The country's municipalities and regions are responsible for ensuring that the conditions and resources are in place for activities to carry out qualified work. Shortcomings in case handling, cooperation, a lack of competence and a lack of initiatives aimed at persons exposed to sexual exploitation, prostitution and human trafficking can have serious consequences for individuals and, by extension, society. For example, it is important that social services and health care professionals have in-depth knowledge of this group's need for support and treatment.

In the agency's work on the assignment, it has become evident that professionals who specifically work with individuals who are exploited in prostitution and human trafficking or who purchase sexual services are familiar with much of the work done in the target area. However, there are still knowledge gaps among authorities and activities/organisations that encounter these individuals but do not treat them as a specific target group. This includes those who work in the health care sector, social services, the police and the judicial system. In the survey, several of the interviewed activities/organisations reported that the current knowledge in different activities/organisations is often based on the level of interest and commitment among certain individuals, which creates a risk of disparate outcomes when, for example, a case concerns access to essential emergency support.

The Swedish Gender Equality Agency's online training was created with the aim of disseminating basic knowledge to a large group of professionals. The agency believes that there is good reason to continue developing routines and checklists compiled in manual form and to offer in-depth knowledge to various professionals.

Areas where the agency has identified particularly significant knowledge gaps are, for example, knowledge of people who buy sexual services, children's exposure to sexual exploitation online and multiple forms of exploitation. Within the framework of the Swedish Gender Equality Agency's assignment to strengthen the work to combat prostitution and honour-related violence and oppression, the focus will include a survey of initiatives that target multiple forms of exploitation.

The Swedish gender Equality Agency has also found that more authorities need to include issues related to prostitution and human trafficking in their work to combat men's violence against women and that knowledge in this area needs to be strengthened at a strategic level.

In order to create an overall picture of sexual exploitation, prostitution and human trafficking, along with an in-depth picture of specific areas, further research and regular surveys need to be carried out. In terms of preventive efforts, for example, it has been difficult to identify evidence-based methods that are transferable to a Swedish context.

When it comes the treatment of the target population in their encounters with authorities and organisations, the results of the survey generally reveal major shortcomings. Poor treatment not only affects the victim, but it can also have consequences for the support offered or the ability to investigate crimes. When respondents who are exposed to prostitution were asked what worries them, more than 60 percent answer, “being treated badly by the authorities” and over 85 percent answered that they have experienced stigmatization. Just over a third of the respondents stated that they had encountered discrimination due to their exposure to prostitution and human trafficking. Awareness-raising efforts in issues concerning the way this population is treated in these encounters should therefore be a priority.

### **4.7. RECOMMENDATIONS**

In line with the reasoning presented in 4.1–4.4, the Swedish Gender Equality Agency proposes the following:

- There is a need for systematic follow-up and the further development of methods for quality-assured and comparable data collection.
- Crime prevention and crime investigation efforts should be carried out on the internet to reduce the number of people, both children and young people, who are exposed to prostitution or sexual exploitation.
- Qualitative and coordinated support should be offered throughout Sweden to reach people exposed to prostitution and human trafficking and people who purchase sexual services.
- The Swedish Gender Equality Agency has initiated a national evaluation of several BOSS clinics/Evonhuset in collaboration with the county administrative boards. Long-term funding is needed to ensure that this study can be completed.
- More activities and organisations should use screening tools that include questions about sexual exploitation, prostitution and human trafficking in order to identify at risk individuals.
- The national support program, NSP, which is administrated by The Swedish Platform – Civil Society against Human Trafficking, is a critical tool for being able to offer the kind of support that Sweden has committed to offer

according to its international commitments. In order to be able to continue to offer qualitative support and further develop the forms of support offered, long-term funding is needed.

- The Swedish Gender Equality Agency contends that it is important to raise awareness of exposure to prostitution and human trafficking within the ordinary activities of the social services and health care in order to identify vulnerable people and victims and, if necessary, refer them to specialized support activities.
- The Swedish gender Equality Agency highlights the importance of ensuring that the permanent coordination effort continues to evaluate working methods and disseminates tools to professionals, such as routines compiled in manual form, checklists and screening tools. The agency has also identified a continued need for competence-building initiatives, and the new online training will be supplemented with another module relating to the treatment of the target population in their encounters with authorities and other organisations.
- The National Board of Health and Welfare should develop structured risk assessments that can be used in cases of suspected sexual exploitation, prostitution and human trafficking, similar to what the National Board of Health and Welfare has previously developed for suspected cases of violence in close relationships or honour-related violence and oppression.

### **4.7.1. A strengthened children's rights perspective**

- The national action plan to combat prostitution and human trafficking should be updated by strengthening the children's rights perspective and adding a focus on particularly vulnerable groups and multiple forms of exploitation. The responsibilities and initiatives/interventions offered in the area within the health care sector need to be made visible through a new action plan.
- The Swedish Gender Equality Agency has identified a need to provide the regional coordinators with the conditions they need to work more directly with children, which requires increased funding that is more long-term in character.
- The development work carried out within Barnahus, which aims to include children exposed to sexual exploitation, prostitution and human trafficking to a greater extent, should be continued.
- Current routines and guidelines in the health care sector and social services should be supplemented to include proven approaches to identify and prevent sexual exploitation and human trafficking.

- The agency has also identified the need for a comprehensive national survey of the support and protection measures currently offered to children and young people who are exposed to sexual exploitation.
- The Swedish Gender Equality Agency's view is that professionals in the field have a continued and extensive need for support in matters relating to sexual exploitation and the vulnerability of young people online.
- It must be ensured that teachers in the new subject area, Sexuality, Consent and Relationships, are offered knowledge and methodological support about sexual exploitation, prostitution and human trafficking. The target area should also be included in the competence efforts that will be offered under the government's "Action package to intensify work against men's violence against women".



## REFERENCES

- De Cabo, A. & Hall, A. (2021). *Omfattningskartläggning av prostitution och människohandel för sexuella ändamål. [Survey of the extent of prostitution and human trafficking for sexual purposes]*. University of Gothenburg.
- Europol (2020). *EXPLOITING ISOLATION: Offenders and victims of online child sexual abuse during the COVID-19 pandemic*. Retrieved from: [https://www.europol.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/europol\\_covid\\_report-cse\\_jun2020v.3\\_0.pdf](https://www.europol.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/europol_covid_report-cse_jun2020v.3_0.pdf)
- Finch, N. & O'Donnell, R. (2021). *IN NEED OF TARGETED SUPPORT The role of Barnahus in identification and investigation of child trafficking and the support and assistance provided to victims*. The Council of the Baltic Sea States Secretariat.
- Fredlund, C., Svedin, C.G, Priebe, G., & Jonsson, L. (2017). *Self-reported frequency of sex as self-injury (SASI) in a national study of Swedish adolescents and association to socialdemographic factors, sexual behaviours, abuse and mental health*. *Child and adolescent Psychiatry and Mental Health*, 1:11.
- Government Offices of Sweden. (2016). *Makt, mål och myndighet – feministisk politik för en jämställd framtid [Power, Goals, and Authority – Feminist Policies for an Equal Future]*. Skr. 2016/17:10. Retrieved from: <https://www.regeringen.se/rattsliga-dokument/skrivelse/2016/11/skr.-20161710/>
- Government Offices of Sweden. (2018). *Handlingsplan mot prostitution och människohandel [Action plan to combat prostitution and human trafficking]*. Retrieved from: [https://www.regeringen.se/4a4f9a/globalassets/regeringen/dokument/socialdepartementet/jamstalldhet/handlingsplan\\_prostitution-manniskohandel\\_aug-2018.pdf](https://www.regeringen.se/4a4f9a/globalassets/regeringen/dokument/socialdepartementet/jamstalldhet/handlingsplan_prostitution-manniskohandel_aug-2018.pdf)
- Government Offices of Sweden. (2019). *Uppdrag att stärka arbetet mot att barn och unga respektive vuxna utnyttjas i prostitution och människohandel samt kartlägga omfattningen av prostitution och människohandel [Strengthening the work to combat the exploitation of children and young people and adults in prostitution and human trafficking and surveying the extent of prostitution and human trafficking]*; A2019/01571/ JÄM A2019/00873/JÄM.
- Hammarström, S., Nilsen, Lindroth, M., Stenqvist, K. & Bernhardsson, S. (2019). *Identifying young people exposed to or at risk of sexual ill health: pilot implementation of an evidence-informed toolkit (SEXIT) at Swedish youth clinics*. *The European Journal of Contraception & Reproductive Health Care*, DOI: 10.1080/13625187.2018.1564815

- Svedin, C.G., Priebe, G., Wadsby, M. Jonsson, L. & Fredlund C. (2014). *Unga, sex och internet – i en föränderlig värld [Young people, sex and the internet – in a changing world]*. Stiftelsen Allmänna Barnhuset.
- Svedin, C. G. & Priebe, G. (2004). Ungdomars sexualitet – attityder och erfarenheter [Adolescents' Sexuality Attitudes and Experiences]. Section: Sexuell exploatering. Att sälja sex mot ersättning/pengar [Young people's sexuality – Attitudes and experiences. Section: Sexual exploitation. Selling sex for remuneration/money]. Child and Adolescent Psychiatry: Lund university.
- Svedin, C. G. & Priebe, G. (2009). 'Unga, sex och Internet' i *Ungdomsstyrelsen [Young People, Sex and the Internet' in Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society]*. *Se Mig! Unga om sex och Internet [See me! – Young People, Sex and the Internet]*. Ungdomsstyrelsens skrifter, 2009:9. Fritzes; Stockholm.
- Svedin, C.G., Landberg, Å. & Jonsson, L. (2021). *Unga, sex och internet efter #metoo – om ungdomars sexualitet och utsatthet för sexuella övergrepp och sexuell exploatering i Sverige 2020/2021 [Young people, sex and the internet since #metoo – young people's sexuality and vulnerability to sexual abuse and sexual exploitation in Sweden 2020/2021]*. Stiftelsen Allmänna Barnhuset.
- The County Administrative Board in Stockholm. (2015). *Prostitutionen i Sverige 2014 – En omfattningskartläggning (Prostitution in Sweden 2014 – A survey)*. Retrieved from: <https://www.lansstyrelsen.se/gavleborg/om-oss/vara-tjanster/publikationer/2015/prostitutionen-i-sverige-2014-en-omfattningskartlaggning.html>
- The National Board of Health and Welfare. (2016). *Förslag till modell för att samla kunskap om prostitutionen [Proposed model to gather knowledge about prostitution]*
- The Public Health Agency of Sweden (2019). *Sexuell och reproduktiv hälsa och rättigheter i Sverige 2017 [Sexual and reproductive health and rights in Sweden 2017]*. Results from the population-based survey 2017. The Public Health Agency of Sweden.



P.O. Box 73, SE-424 22 Angered  
Visiting address: Angereds torg 9  
Phone: +46 31-392 90 00  
[www.swedishgenderequalityagency.se](http://www.swedishgenderequalityagency.se)



**SWEDISH GENDER  
EQUALITY AGENCY**