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Statement on the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (Lanzarote Convention)

Exit Prostitution Association is thankful for the opportunity to give a statement regarding the Lanzarote Convention especially on the topic of sexual exploitation and technology. Our statement lifts topics from the questionnaire based on our work with the youth (Youth Exit) in cases of sexual maltreatment. Youth Exit works on the domain of primary and secondary prevention of sexual maltreatment, online and commercial sexual exploitation being two of the many forms of sexual abuse that youth face.

General remarks:

Different forms of sexual maltreatment are part of everyday life for youth. According to *Kouluterveyskysely* in years 2013 (*National School Study*) show that from girls 60% and 33-46% of the boys recognize that they have experienced some sort of sexual harassment or abuse. The same study from 2015 brought up that 15-20% of the youth have experienced sexual harassment or abuse online. It is important to remember that these figures only show the exploitation that is recognized and can for example hide all the abuse in close relationship both online and offline. *Lapsiuhritutkimus (The Child Victim Study, 2013)* points out that most of the “sexual relations” with adults have started in the age of 14 to 15. In most cases the child did not consider it as exploitation.

According to the *Finnish National Rapporteur of Human Trafficking* victim identification in cases of human trafficking for sexual exploitation, especially of children, is inadequate. Due to the limited amount of identified cases of child sex trafficking in Finland, the Assistance System is not aware of any specific initiatives or practices referring especially to the case of trafficked minors. All forms of sexual exploitation online and using applications and other forms of technology are rarely named and recognised. The trafficking of children is mentioned on the *National Action Plan against Human Trafficking*, but trafficking linked to technology does not come up.

When it comes to commercial sexual exploitation there's not enough of research on the topic and data of the youth and children involved. That being said it's known that big part of buying of sex happens online, which is also true in exploitation of underage. Buying of sex needs to be criminalized in Finland to protect children and youth from commercial sexual exploitation both on- and offline. Our view is that it is not enough to have buying of sex from underage illegal, since the age of 18 is a thin line and sex buyers are indifferent when it comes to age of the people in commercial sexual exploitation. Special attention needs to be drawn to 18-29 old persons, who are still considered “youth” according to the Finnish law but on the other hand “legal adults to sell sex”. Finland would need a program for young adults and adults for exiting prostitution and other forms of commercial sexual exploitation. This was also required in the Finnish Parliament in 2006 in the process of deciding on the partial criminalization of buying sex. The research in Sweden shows that the attitudes of youth have changed after the legislation: it's important to highlight equality in all sexual relations no matter the age. Sexual maltreatment and exploitation is not sex, and sex is never an act of exchange.

Council of Europe Committee of Ministers Recommendation No. R(91) 11 to Member States Concerning Sexual Exploitation, Pornography and Prostitution of, and Trafficking in, Children and Young Adults. We would like to stress the importance of the notions in the Council of Europe Recommendation No. R (91) 11

which acknowledges the artificial division of underage and adult prostitution. The recommendation addresses the harm done in prostitution to both minors and young adults. In Finland there is a lack of comprehensive data about the entering age in prostitution. According to a customer survey made by *Pro-tukipiste (2000)* 10 women out of 40 had entered prostitution as a minor which is also in line with the international average age of entering prostitution which is under 18 years. *Vuorelainen (2012)* remarks that professionals have lot of silent information about the commercial sexual maltreatment, but the area remains undiscussed. A study made in Sweden by *Ahelsson and Hulusjö (2008)* points out that 9,4% of Swedish youth have experience with commercial sexual exploitation. The figures are very alike to the ones gotten from the *Baltic Regional Study by Mossige, Ainsaar and Svedin (2007)*. These figures give some idea of the commonness of the phenomenon.

Exit Prostitution Association's Youth Exit is one of the only and first NGOs bringing commercial sexual abuse of children in to the awareness by talking about compensational / transactional sex and other forms of commercial sexual maltreatment. This is also fulfilling the Convention's requirements fighting against sexual exploitation of children in a civil society level. Other NGO's working visibly against against sexual exploitation of children are *Save the Children Finland (Pelastakaa Lapset)*, *Victim Support Finland (Rikosuhripäivystys, RIKU)*, *Kalliola Settlement (Tytöjen ja Poikien Talot)*, *The Family Federation of Finland (Väestöliitto)* and *the Federation of Mother and Child Homes and Shelters (Ensi-ja turvakotien Liitto)*. All the NGO's mentioned have different forms of direct support of victims of sexual exploitation. Many of the services for victims are online, including Youth Exit's weekly chat and other services. The contacts in our services have almost tripled in the last three years. According to the experiences of NGOs easily accessible individualised, low-threshold services online are usually the easiest way for youth to get help. There are not enough resources for services directed at youth in cases of sexual exploitation, especially when it comes to commercial sexual abuse, since Youth Exit (Nuorten Exit) is the only NGO working especially with this topic. Areal inequality becomes clear when trying redirect the victims into a in easily accessible face-to-face services outside the metropolitan area. The lack of resources directed to sexual exploitation of youth concerns professionals working with youth in governmental, national, communal and NGO level. There are also plenty of good practises in outreach work with youth that are not put in use because of the lack of funding and personnel resources.

Save the Children Finland has an online service (*Nettivilje*) where one can report child sexual exploitation material. The otanvastuun.fi (*I take responsibility*) website maintained by Save the Children provides online self-help material for those linked to illegal online sexual activity targeting children and the possible consequences of such activity. Preventing sexual exploitation requires services also directed to adults and abusers. The most important international cooperation regarding sexual exploitation of children and youth on a NGO level is the cooperation with *ECPAT*. International cooperation helps set guidelines when it comes to good practises and terminology.

There is deficient awareness of the phenomenon of commercial sexual exploitation in Finland amongst authorities and the general public. Lack of dealing with the issues of sexual exploitation and ICT in basic education for professionals is evident. Exit executes training for professionals working with youth, but the general knowledge on the topic is poor since the subject of sexual exploitation is highly neglected in the curriculum on the field of social and health professionals. There's only little of material that would cover the issue of children, technology and commercial sexual abuse. Because of the lack of research, training and information, professionals seldom have capacity to bring up the issue sexual exploitation or recognize exploitation happening online. Especially information and tools for intervening are crucial for personnel that work with so called "risk groups" which might include for example children living in institutions, youth with substance abuse or the children with different experiences of violence and maltreatment.

In grammar school the issue of sexual abuse is mostly brought up in health education classes on the 8th grade. It depends on the teacher how much and in what depth sexual abuse, media education and ways of safe and responsible ways of using ICT are dealt with. The amount of information given on this matter varies greatly in different textbooks. Adults and professionals easily overlook children's action in the internet and do not

understand that using the mobile phones is a big part of everyday life of the youth: their social relationships and identities are built both online and offline. It would be necessary to strengthen the capabilities of using ICT safely without judgement. Youth deserve and need also the strengthening of their self value, sexual self-determination and sexual rights through more comprehensive health and sexual education that would not be so much focused on contraceptive and disease preventive aspect. Sex-positive outtake is the key to efficient sexual education, because negative attitudes towards sexuality, sex and technology can easily alienate youth. The risk-filled or negative attitude towards both technology and sex can make it even harder to approach authorities or adults when facing sexual maltreatment.

The education needs to take into account the LBTIQ Youth for whom technology might offer the only place to discover, ask questions, find someone alike and get information, but also a place where exploitation can happen if the child is not provided sufficient support and information. Many studies show that LBTIQ youth experience harassment and abuse more than their peers and find it harder to get help. The fear of the reactions of parents and peers make it harder to reach out for help. Cultural and gender sensitivity, education and tools are needed also for parents to guarantee equal opportunities for all youth. *Mitä kuuluu sateenkaarinuorille Suomessa? – study (How is the LHBTIQ-youth doing in Finland?)* reveals, that 40% of trans youth have been requested to send nude photos or take their clothes off in front of camera, 10% of them have been in situations where someone have approached them online trying to buy sex. 25-28% of the youth in the study had been approached online by a person 5 years or more older online.

One of the most problematic things about the public discussion regarding sexual exploitation of children and youth is the focusing on the behaviour and for example appearances of the victim. This easily turns into victim blaming and justifies exploitation online or offline on the activity of the victim (child). The society has the responsibility to protect the most vulnerable ones: the children and youth in question.

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