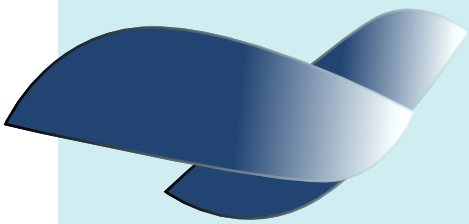


Annual Report on Human Trafficking 2023



NATIONAL ASSISTANCE SYSTEM
FOR VICTIMS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Combating Human Trafficking Requires Vast Cooperation

Cross-administrative work against trafficking in human beings, which falls within the remit of five ministries and is actively managed by the authorities and non-governmental organisations, has a significant role in society. Human trafficking is hidden crime, and detecting it is in society's interest in many ways.

The National Assistance System for Victims of Human Trafficking (NAS) is a national expert authority and centre of excellence in the work against human trafficking. Its statutory tasks include identifying and assisting victims, and its work contributes to crime prevention.

The requirement imposed by the Council of Europe Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA) on Finland is unequivocal: all cases of human trafficking in Finland must be identified. As the NAS does not engage in outreach work but still has an obligation to identify and assist victims, a large number of other stakeholders are needed to refer these persons to the system

In statistics going back several years, Victim Support Finland, the police and shelters emerge as important operators that help bring human trafficking cases to light.

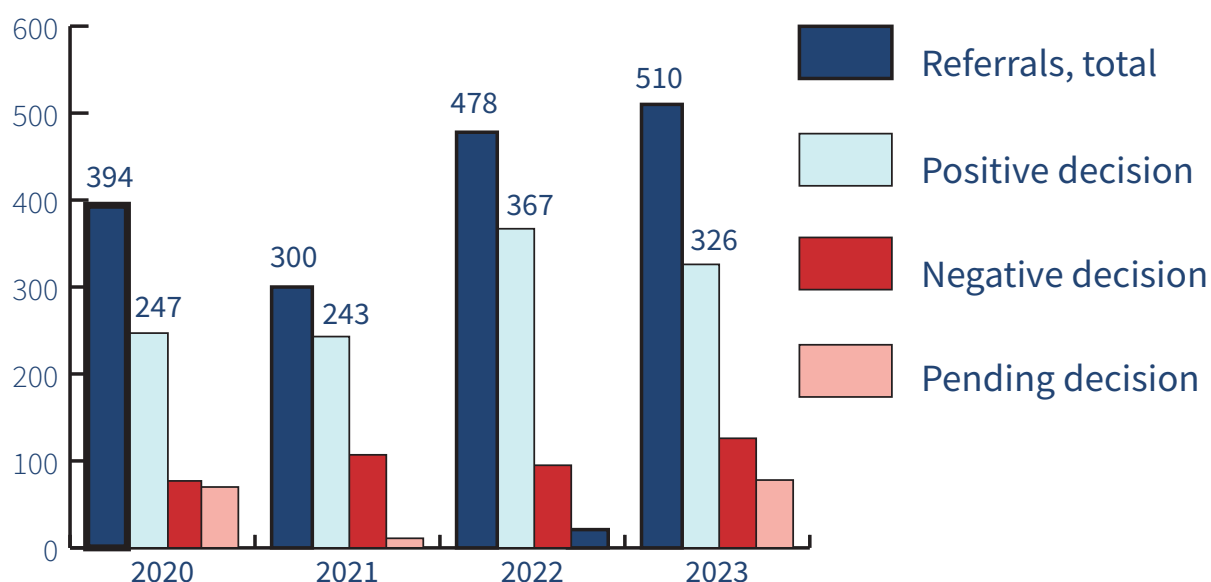
The NAS has a regular and continuous training program for stakeholders, NGOs, and other operators within the field which has increased awareness of the topic, promoted detections of cases and made identifying victims easier. The NAS extensively consults, trains and instructs different operators in Finland and also participates in international efforts to combat trafficking in human beings.

While the numbers of detected forced labour and sexual exploitation cases used to be equal, labour exploitation cases have now doubled in number. In some cases that have attracted public attention, the number of victims has been exceptionally high for Finnish circumstances.

Increased Number of New Applications

In 2023, a total of 510 new applications to the Assistance System were recorded, which was more than in 2022. There has been an increasing trend.

All Referrals 2020-2023

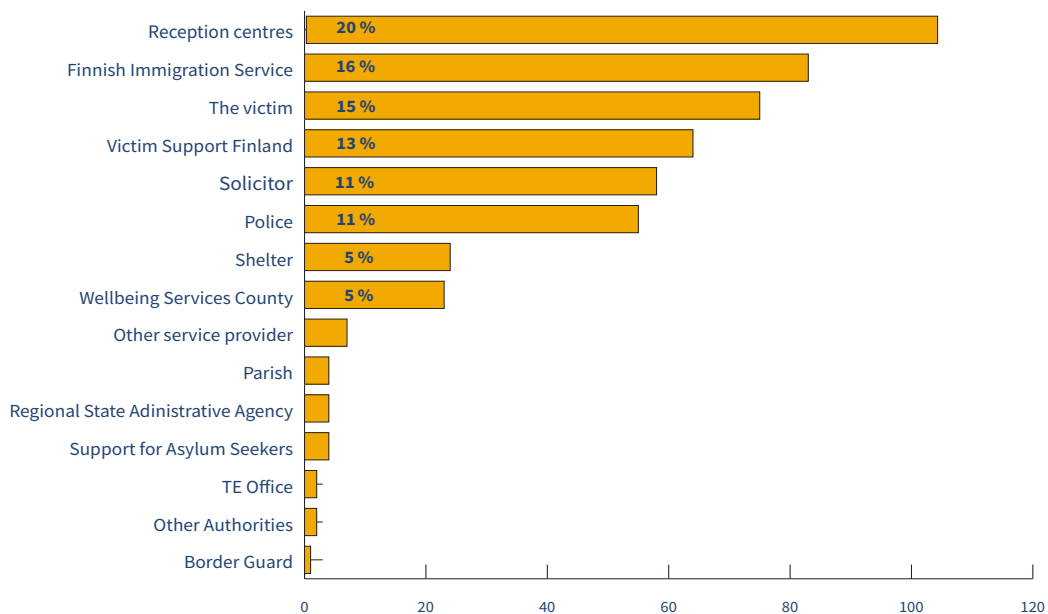


Looking at older statistics, it is clear that the phenomenon is growing and that the numbers have increased year to year. It is relevant to ask if the actual phenomenon has genuinely grown, or if the authorities' and NGOs' work is more efficient. Presumably, both factors are at play and the police, at least, have played a key role in investigating recent cases of forced labour.

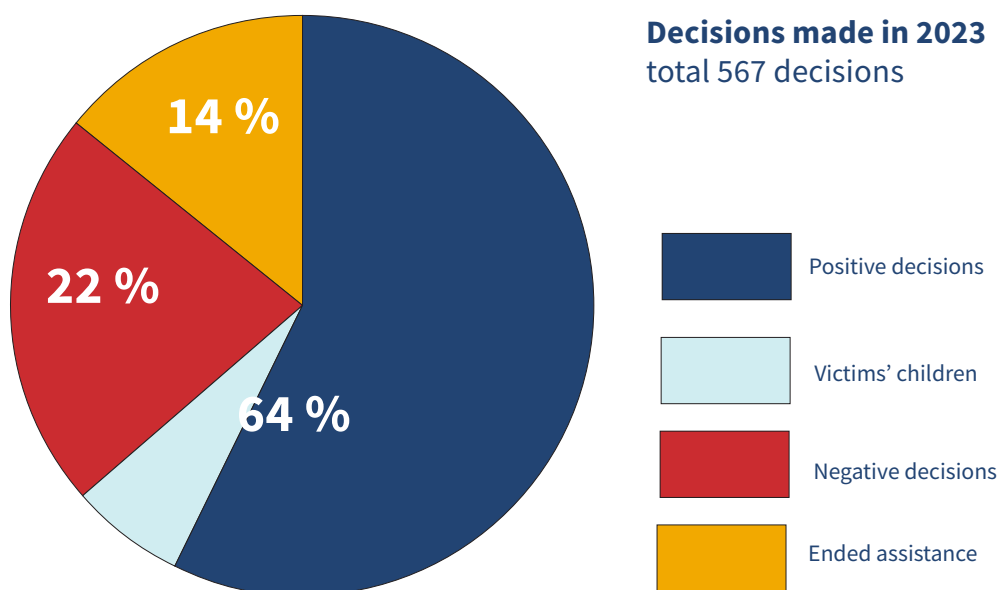
The growing number of cases reflects the intensified measures for detecting trafficking in human beings, identifying victims and referring them to assistance as well as the work of a police unit specialising in trafficking. Sensitivity to identifying the phenomenon and skills in tackling it have improved.

510 New Applications in 2023

Operators that referred clients to the Assistance System in 2023.
The number of applications submitted was 510.

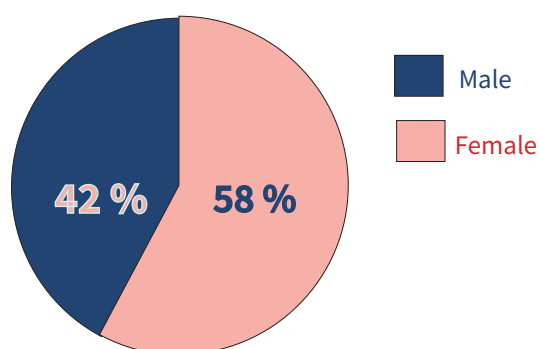


Applications to the National Assistance System are submitted through many stakeholders who know how to identify victims of exploitation. Key actors have in most cases included Victim Support Finland and the police. TE Offices come up in the statistics for the first time.



New Clients in 2023

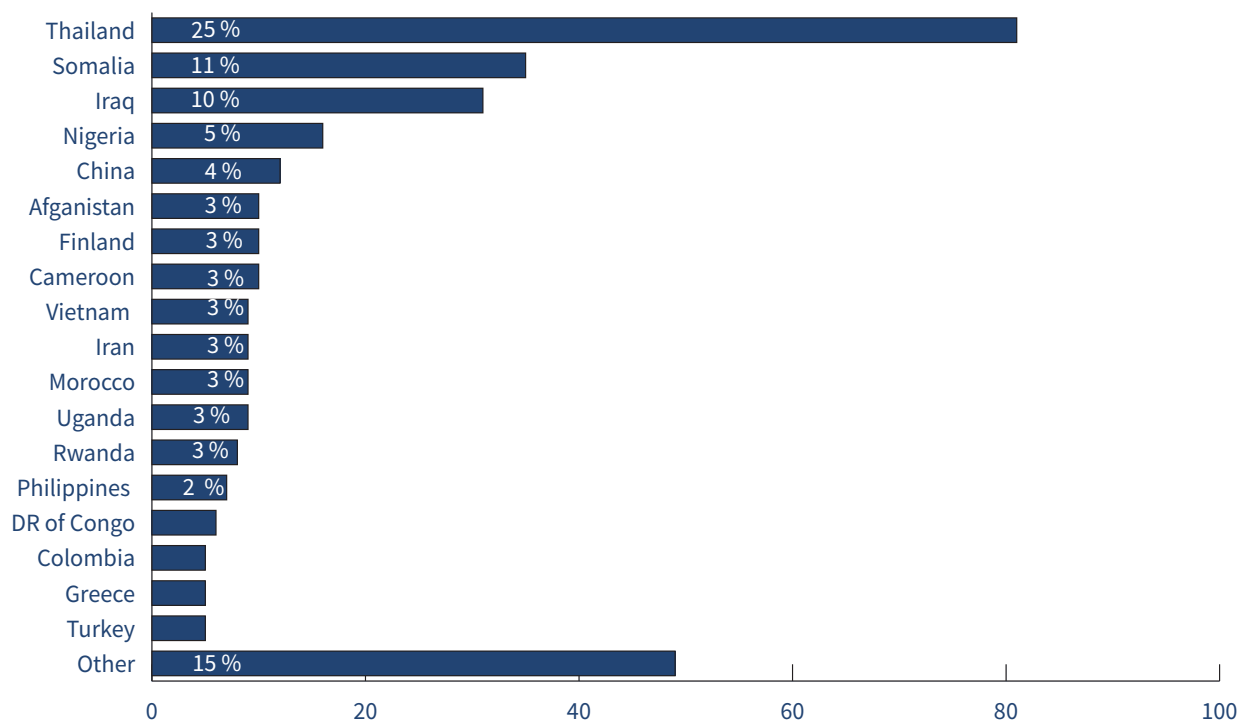
New clients in 2023
315 adults, 11 minors



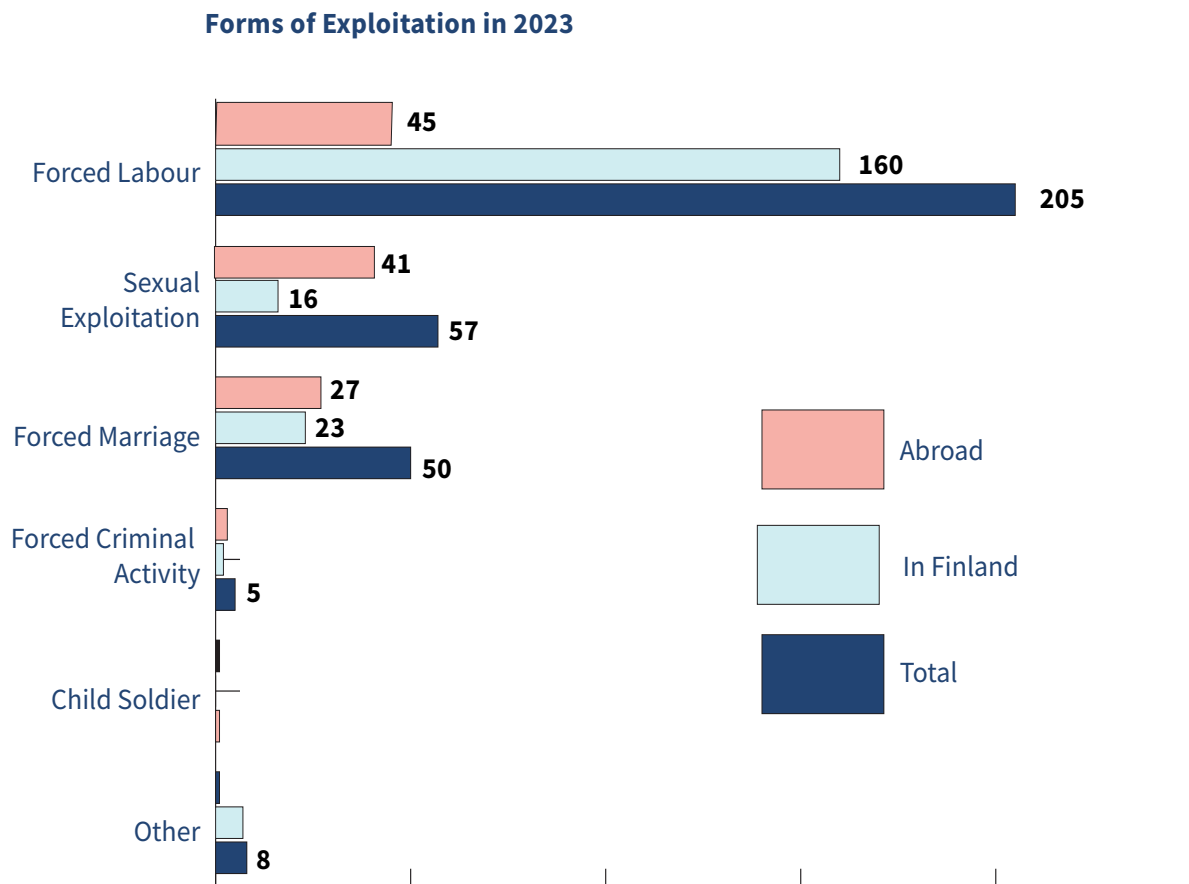
In 2023, 326 new clients were admitted to the system, slightly over one half of whom were women and girls. Additionally, 36 victims' children were admitted (totalling 362). Approx. 4% of the clients were minors, 34% were aged from 18 to 29, 37% from 30 to 39, 14% from 40 to 49 and 5% from 50 to 59. Two clients were older than this, and the ages of 20 adults were not recorded in the statistics.

The new clients represented 47 nationalities (the nationalities of three clients were recorded as unknown). Other countries (15%) on the list include all nationalities represented by fewer than five people. The victims of exploitation also included Finnish citizens.

New clients (total 326) by nationality in 2023



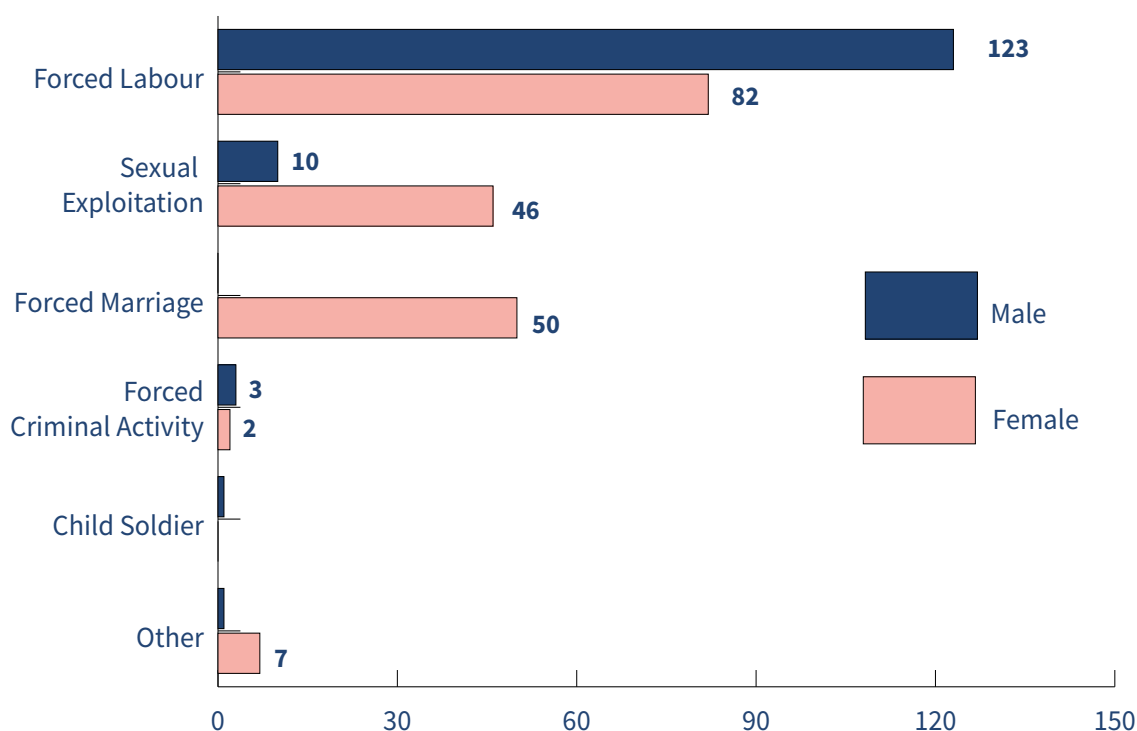
Forced Labour the Most Common Form of Exploitation



In the majority (64%) of all exploitation cases in 2023, the exploitation had taken place in Finland. Forced labour was the most significant form of trafficking in human beings in 2023. Human trafficking is one of the consequences of the grey economy. Labour exploitation is a flagrant violation of Finnish labour legislation and national acts, including the Criminal Code. It also always involves economic crime. The exploitation of workers brings considerable economic benefits. It distorts competition and gives undue advantage to companies that exploit vulnerable people. Combatting it is highly important for Finnish society and economy. The National Assistance System's work contributes to crime prevention and helps victims of crime.

Forced labour has many typical features. The employees do not have the usual rights to refuse tasks. The employee may owe a debt to the employer, and threats of violence, deportation or informing the authorities may be used. The victim's personal freedom may also be restricted, and they have often been misled or lied to about the terms of employment.

Exploitation Forms by Gender in 2023



Of all new clients, 11 were minors, most of whom had also been victims of forced labour. In regard to minors, the victim's consent is irrelevant.

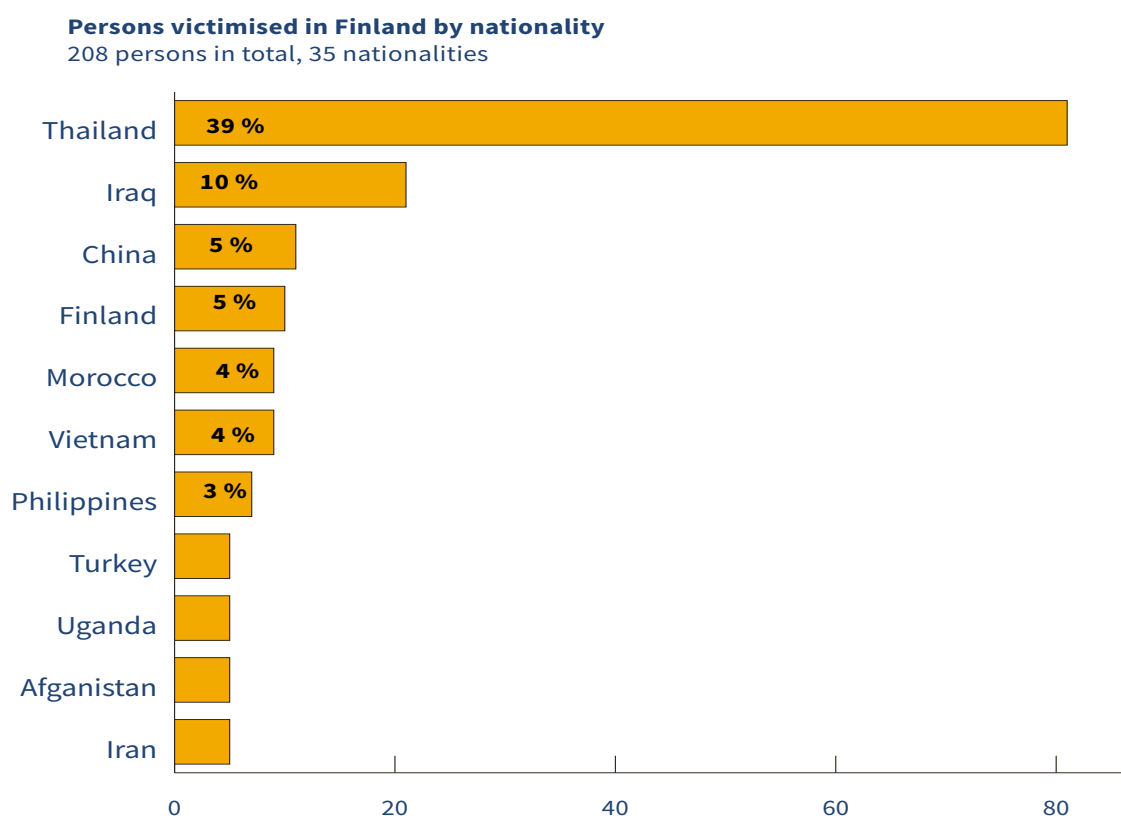
Victims of forced marriage and sexual exploitation are mostly women. Last year, men were at a slightly higher risk of becoming victims of forced labour than women.

Persons who have been victimised abroad are also assisted in Finland. For instance, forced labour or a forced marriage may have fully or partly taken place abroad even if the victim had been previously living in Finland.

Exploitation Cases in Finland

In 2023, 208 victims had been exploited in Finland. In these cases, 107 of the victims were male; 101 were female, including one who was a minor. They represented 35 nationalities, while the nationalities of two clients were reported as unknown in the statistics. As many as 39% were from Thailand, while the distribution of other nationalities was more even. All cases where Finnish citizens had been exploited had occurred in Finland.

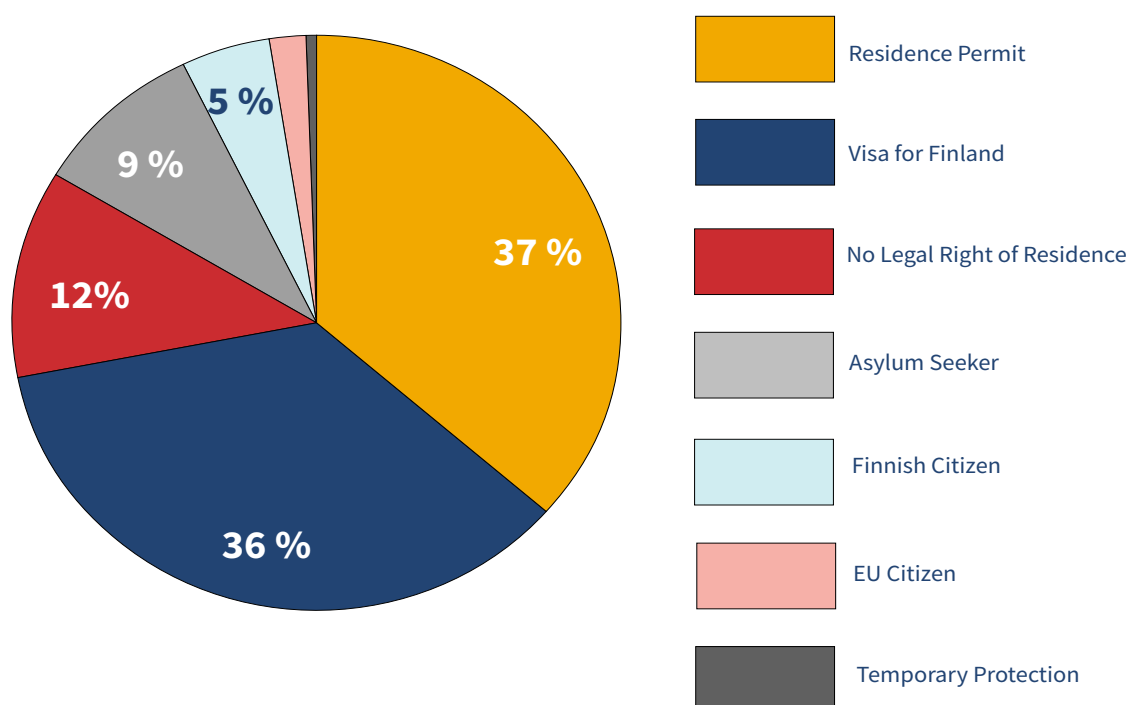
Most of the cases involved forced labour. The industries included picking of wild produce (32%), berry farms (24%), the restaurant sector (13%), cleaning (11%), well-being (4%) and the horticultural sector (4%). Exploitation also took place in many other industries.



Vulnerable persons had performed various types of unskilled work for a private individual, or for commercial operators under contracts drawn up by a private individual (in sectors including cleaning, gardening, snow clearing, laying of paving stones). No language proficiency or other skills are required in tasks of this kind.

Two factors stand out in the statistics: a large proportion of the exploited persons had either a residence permit or a visa for Finland (73% in total). Their cases may have involved systematic criminal activity perpetrated by the operator that employed them. Another significant observation is the relatively small proportion of those staying in Finland without a legal right of residence (12%). These persons are vulnerable and run a high risk of being exploited. However, identifying them is challenging for multiple reasons. They are intimidated by threats of deportation, or they have no means to find out about Finnish legislation and the rules of Finnish society.

Persons victimised in Finland by right of residence

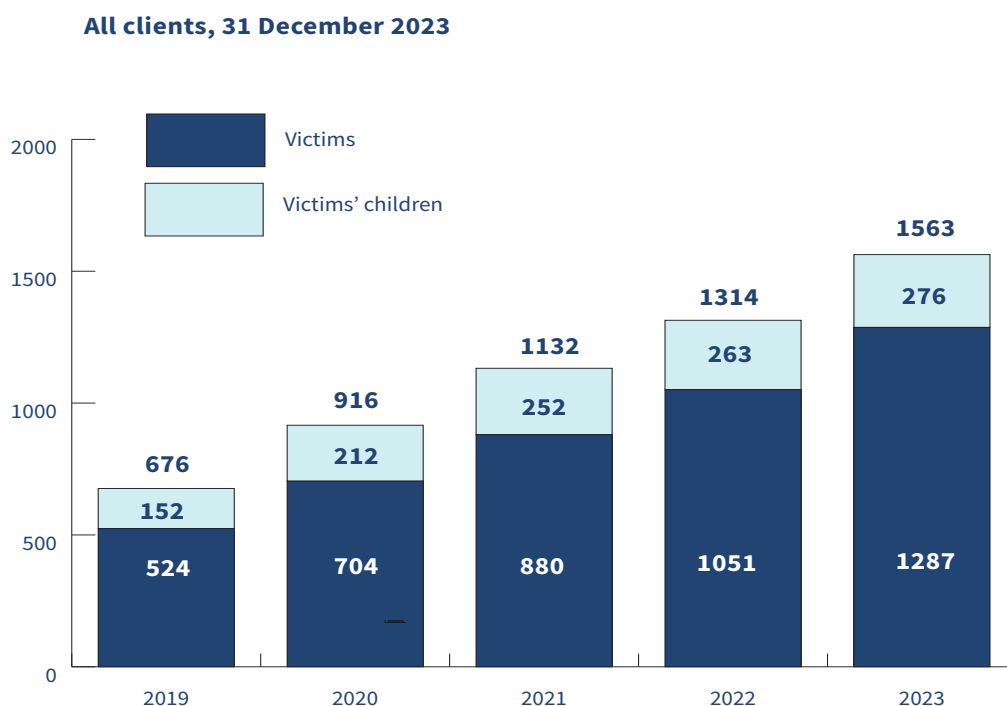


The most typical way in which exploitation cases came to light in Finland was a report made by the victim (22% of all cases). Around one half of these persons were identified as trafficking victims and admitted to the NAS. Information on 21% of all cases came from Victim Support Finland, while 17% came from the police. Almost all of these persons were identified as victims of trafficking in human beings.

A large proportion were also referred to the system by solicitors, shelters, reception centres and wellbeing services counties. More than a half of these persons (53%) were admitted to the NAS. The assistance of the authorities and NGOs facilitates the identification of victims. The NAS supports these activities by its work.

All Clients, 31 December 2023

On 31 December 2023, the assistance system had 1,563 clients, of whom 1,287 were identified victims and 276 were their underaged children. There were 19 children among the victims, and 105 clients had been admitted to the system while minors. Women accounted for approx. 60% of the trafficking victims.

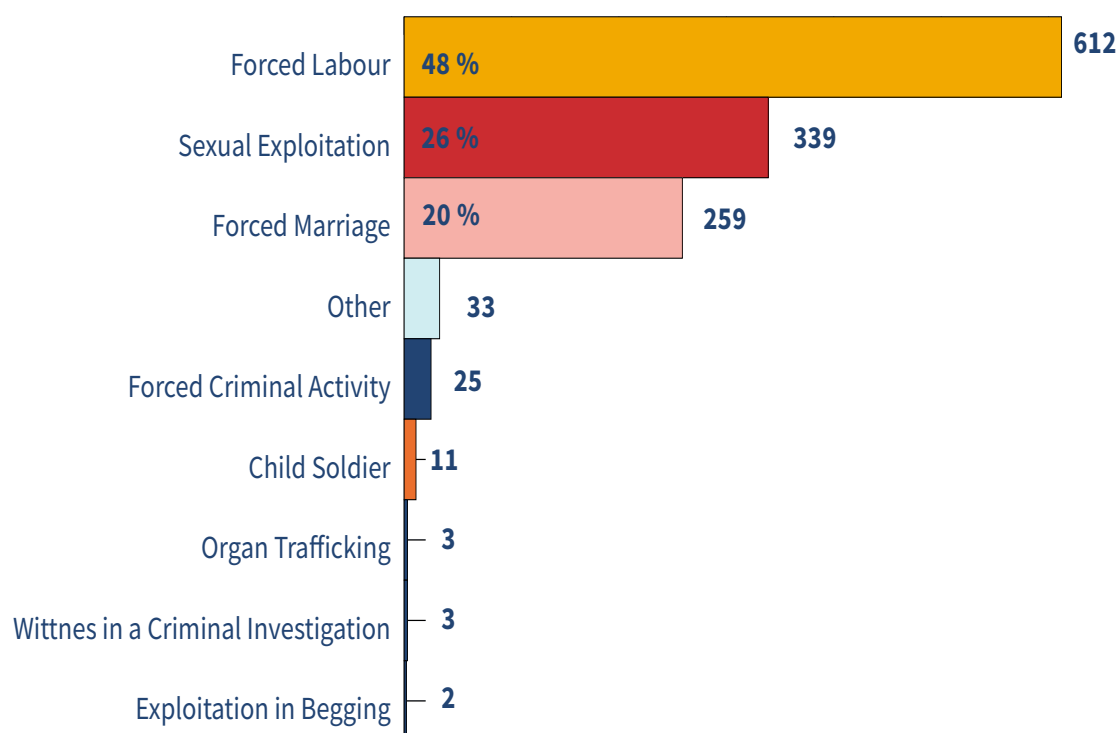


Nearly a half (48%) of National Assistance System clients are victims of forced labour. Combined, victims of sexual abuse (26%) and forced marriage (20%) accounted for almost equally large share. Other forms of exploitation have been identified less often.

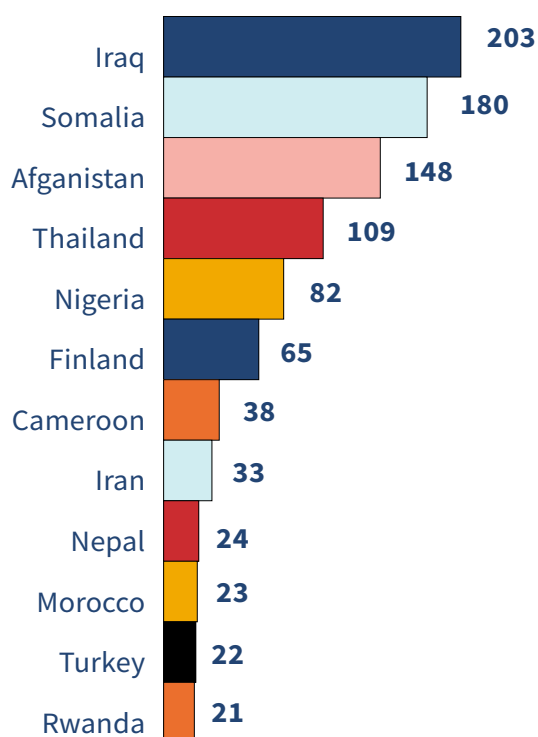
A trafficking victim who does not have a legal residence permit in Finland may be granted a reflection period, during which they may stay in Finland legally. The duration of the reflection period may be from one to six months.

In 2023, the NAS had granted reflection periods to 17 victims of trafficking, usually for two to six months.

Forms of Exploitation, All Clients, 31 December 2023



Largest Nationalities, 31 December 2023



10 to 19 persons per nationality:

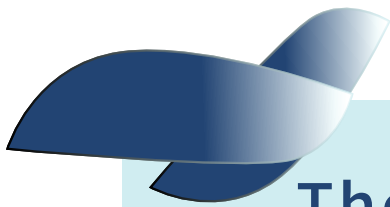
Democratic Republic of Congo, Vietnam, Bangladesh, Eritrea, Syria, Russia, Philippines, Gambia, Uganda, China, Ukraine

Less than 10 persons per nationality:

Pakistan, Angola, India, Bulgaria, Ghana, Sudan, Colombia, Kenya, Côte d'Ivoire

In addition, also 45 nationalities represented by fewer than 4 persons, and 15 individuals of unknown or no nationality.

In total, 77 different nationalities



The NAS in a nutshell

The National Assistance System for Victims of Human Trafficking, which has operated since 2006, is a national centre of excellence and expert authority in the work against human trafficking. Joutseno Reception Centre, which is part of the Finnish Immigration Service, is responsible for the system. The NAS has three offices (Lappeenranta, Helsinki and Tampere).

The purpose of the NAS is to help trafficking victims, their underage children, and persons who assist in investigations of trafficking offences. It helps both Finnish and foreign victims of human trafficking equally.

As required by their needs, the client is entitled to advice and guidance, social and health care services, a reception allowance or social assistance, safe housing, and interpretation and translation services. If the client wishes to go back to their home country, they receive assistance for voluntary return. Clients may be provided with legal advice and aid.

The organisation of the assistance and the services provided for victims have been decentralised to different actors. The practical delivery of the assistance depends on the applicant's right of residence. If they do not have a municipality of residence in Finland, their services are provided by the NAS. Asylum seekers receive their basic services from the reception centres, in addition to which they receive advice and, if necessary, services from the NAS. If the client has a municipality of residence in Finland, their services are provided by the wellbeing services county. They may also receive advice from the NAS. Provision of services by the NAS ends when the client no longer needs assistance, leaves the country, or wishes to end their client relationship with the system. This leads to a turnover of clients within the system from year to year.

The NAS maintains the national website ihmiskauppa.fi and a 24/7 helpline at 02954 63 177.

Additional information:

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