

THE PROBLEM OF CHILD TRAFFICKING IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

Child trafficking is a very serious issue which can have a devastating and lasting impact on its victims. Children can be trafficked into, within and out of the UK. The Government of the UK is absolutely committed to tackling this issue and set out the steps it would take together with the action needed and responsibilities of a whole range of partners who also have roles to play.

The trafficking of children is a clandestine activity, which makes it difficult to identify victims and record their numbers. The evidence from successive reports from the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) indicate that there are approximately 300 child trafficking victims identified in the UK per annum. Children are trafficked for many reasons, including sexual exploitation, domestic servitude, labour, benefit fraud and involvement in criminal activity such as pick-pocketing, theft and working in cannabis farms. There are a number of cases of minors being exploited in the sex industry. Children may be trafficked from other countries for a variety of reasons. There are a number of factors in the country of origin which might make children vulnerable to being trafficked. The factors listed below are by no means a comprehensive list: poverty; lack of education; discrimination; cultural attitudes; grooming; dysfunctional families; political conflict and economic transition and inadequate local laws and regulations.

Traffickers use a variety of methods to recruit their victims. Some children are coerced, but most are trapped in subversive ways. For example, children may be promised education or 'respectable' work in restaurants or as domestic servants, or parents may be persuaded that their children will have a better life elsewhere. Many children travel on false documents. Even those whose documents are genuine may not have access to them. One way that traffickers exert control over trafficked children is by keeping their passports and threatening children that they will be deported if they escape. Even before they travel, children may be subjected to various forms of abuse and exploitation to ensure that the trafficker's control over them continues after the child is transferred to someone else. Methods used to control a child include: confiscating the child's identity documents; threatening to report the child to the authorities; violence, or threats of violence, towards the child; threats of violence towards members of the child's family; keeping the child socially isolated; keeping the child locked up; telling children that they owe large sums of money and that they must work to pay this off; depriving the child of money; and frightening children with threats based on cultural or belief systems, for example, witchcraft or spirit possession.

Unaccompanied children may come to the UK seeking asylum, or they may be here to attend school or join their family. A child may be the subject of a private fostering arrangement. Some groups of children are instructed by their traffickers to avoid contact with authorities. In other cases the traffickers insist that the child applies for asylum as this gives the child a legitimate right of temporary leave to remain in the UK.

Whilst the majority of child trafficking cases known about involve cross border movement, it is also known that child trafficking occurs within the UK. A number of serious cases involving organised child sexual exploitation and trafficking have raised this issue and, whilst this guidance focuses mainly on trafficking from abroad, agencies should be aware of the risks in relation to this type of trafficking.

Trafficked children may not only be deprived of their rights to health care and freedom from exploitation and abuse, but may also be denied access to education.⁶ The creation of a false identity and implied criminality of the children, together with the loss of family and community, may seriously undermine their sense of self-worth. At the time they are found, trafficked children may not show any obvious signs of distress or imminent harm, but they may be vulnerable to particular types of abuse and may continue to experience the effects of their abuse in the future. Physical abuse can include beatings; being subdued with drugs, on which they then become dependent; alcohol addiction and stress/post traumatic stress-related physical disorders such as skin diseases, migraine and backache.

Children who have been trafficked may be sexually abused as part of being controlled or because they are vulnerable. In many cases, sexual exploitation is the purpose of the trafficking. Children being sexually exploited are at risk of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS; and for girls there is the risk of pregnancy and possible damage to their sexual and reproductive health. The Government has committed to working with partners to develop a national action plan to safeguard children and young people from sexual exploitation.

There are a number of indicators which suggest that a child may have been trafficked into the UK, and may still be controlled by the traffickers or receiving adults. These are as follows: *The child*: has entered the country illegally; has no passport or other means of identification; has false documentation; possesses money and goods not accounted for; is malnourished; is unable to confirm the name and address of the person meeting them on arrival; has had their journey or visa arranged by someone other than themselves or their family; is accompanied by an adult who insists on remaining with the child at all times; is withdrawn and refuses to talk or appears afraid to talk to a person in authority; has a prepared story very similar to those that other children have given; exhibits self-assurance, maturity and self-confidence not expected to be seen in a child of such an age; does not appear to have money but does have a mobile phone; and/or is unable, or reluctant to give details of accommodation or other personal details. *The sponsor*: has previously made multiple visa applications for other children and/or has acted as the guarantor for other children's visa applications; and/or is known to have acted as the guarantor on the visa applications for other visitors who have not returned to their countries of origin on the expiry of those visas.

It is also important to note that trafficked children might not show obvious signs of distress or abuse and this makes it difficult to identify children who may have been trafficked. Some children are unaware that they have been trafficked, while others may actively participate in concealing that they have been trafficked.

Assessing the willingness and capacity of a child victim to testify in court against a trafficker is complicated. This also applies to the process of gathering information that might support care proceedings. The child usually fears reprisal from the traffickers and/or the adults with whom he or she was living in the UK if they co-operate with children's social care or the police. For children trafficked from abroad an additional level of anxiety may exist because of fear of reprisals against their family in their home country. They may also fear being deported because they have entered the UK illegally. Trafficked children may also have been forced to commit criminal offences while they are in a coerced situation. Children, who might agree to testify in a criminal case, fear that they will be discredited in court because they were coerced into lying on their visa applications or immigration papers. No child should be coerced into testifying in court against a trafficker.

Child trafficking Facts and Statistics:

- ✓ 1 in 5 victims of trafficking are children
- ✓ Over 700 children were identified as potential victims of trafficking last year
- ✓ The most common countries for children to be trafficked from are UK, Vietnam, Slovakia, Romania and Nigeria
- ✓ The most common reasons for children to be trafficked are sexual exploitation and criminal exploitation.

List of used sources:

1. Safeguarding children who may have been trafficked. Электронный ресурс www.gov.uk/government/publications/safeguarding-children-who-may-have-been-trafficked-practice-guidance
2. Child trafficking Facts and Statistics Электронный ресурс www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/child-abuse-and-neglect/child-trafficking/child-trafficking-facts-statistics/