



Safeguarding Children from Child Trafficking

The official definition of child trafficking as ratified by the UK government in 2008 is:

'The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered 'trafficking in human beings'.

It is not known exactly how many children have been trafficked into or within the UK as recorded statistics are almost certainly an underestimate. The figures do not include prosecutions for crimes related to trafficking, such as assisting unlawful immigration, false imprisonment and causing, inciting or controlling prostitution for gain. Neither do the statistics include international investigations where the perpetrators were prosecuted in another country. However, it is estimated that 1 in 5 victims of trafficking are children.

Information on trafficking comes from the National Crime Agency (NCA) and, in its 2018 Annual Report the key facts were identified as:

- 5145 potential victims were subject to the National Referral Mechanism in 2017, which is a 35% increase on 2016
- In 2017 victims of trafficking were reported as coming from 116 different nationalities
- Albanian, UK and Vietnamese nationals continue to be the most frequently reported victims
- The most common type of exploitation recorded is for adults and minors for labour exploitation, which can also include criminal exploitation

The NCA collects information from a range of agencies, and cases that meet specific criteria are added to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), which was set up in 2009 to help identify and support victims of trafficking.

Child trafficking is child abuse. Children are recruited, moved or transported and exploited, forced to work or sold. Children are trafficked for:

- Child sexual exploitation
- Illegal adoption
- Benefit fraud
- Forced marriage
- Domestic servitude such as cleaning, childcare and cooking
- Forced labour in factories or agriculture
- Criminal activity such as pickpocketing, begging, transporting drugs, working on cannabis farms, selling pirated DVDs, bag theft
- Harvesting of organs.

Many children are trafficked into the UK from abroad, but children can also be trafficked from one part of the UK to another. Physical, sexual and emotional abuse are often used to control victims of trafficking and many children are likely to be physically and emotionally neglected. Child trafficking is a crime and an abuse of human rights and the key pieces of legislation used to protect victims are:

- Sexual Offences Act 2003
- Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants, etc.) Act 2004
- Coroners and Justice Act 2009.
- Modern Slavery Act 2015

However, it can be difficult to prosecute traffickers because:

- Legislation may be ineffective or may not exist
- Victims may be afraid to give evidence
- Trafficking networks can make it difficult to gather evidence on individuals.

Children who have been trafficked may find it difficult to tell anyone what has happened to them. They may also be inconsistent in telling of their experiences, having been threatened by those who have trafficked them. Many victims of child trafficking don't speak English and children are often too scared to speak out because they are frightened of:

- What will happen to them, their friends and family
- Adults and the 'authorities' who they have difficulty trusting
- Being prosecuted for a crime
- Being returned to their home country where they may have witnessed or experienced abuse, neglect or violence
- Juju or witchcraft rituals which have been performed as part of grooming

They may also feel, or been made to feel, guilty or ashamed about the abuse they have suffered. Some traffickers create stories for victims to recite in case they are approached by anyone in authority, but if a child is suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) they may have difficulty in recalling details or have gaps in their memory.

Child trafficking can have a long-lasting and devastating effect. Being kept captive or living and working in poor conditions can have a serious impact on a child's mental and physical health. They may also be suffering from the effects of multiple forms of neglect, and it is likely that children will feel distressed and alienated if they have been separated from their families, friends, communities and culture. Children are often kept hidden with no access to education or opportunities for social and emotional development.

Children exploited for domestic servitude and forced labour can suffer physical injuries and develop problems with their emotional health. Children trafficked for sexual exploitation are at high risk of prolonged periods of sexual violence causing physical injuries, sexually transmitted infections and, for girls, multiple pregnancies.

The Modern Slavery Strategy was published in 2014 and outlines the inter-agency response to human trafficking. The focus is on the need to raise awareness of child trafficking and ensure victims are treated as victims in need of child protection. All children in care are vulnerable, but those who have been subjected to trafficking require Social Workers and Foster Carers to be vigilant. Risk assessments need to be robust and regularly reviewed, as does the family's Safer Caring Policy.

All those who have contact with children in this situation must be alert to the risk of abduction or the continuation of grooming strategies. Children and young people may not feel able to share their fears, but changes in the child's behaviour and/or mood and presentation should be noted and reported to their Social Worker and the Placement Manager.

Action to be taken

If a child discloses that they have been trafficked, or have been held against their will at any time, Foster Carers and Placement Managers must:

- Follow AFA child protection procedures, contacting the Designated Lead for Child Protection or, in their absence, a Senior Manager.
- If a child is at immediate risk the Police should be contacted, as should the child's Social Worker, their Line Manager or the Duty Worker.
- The child should not be questioned, but any information they give must be recorded as soon as possible.
- Carers and Placement Managers must also make a detailed record of who they spoke to regarding their concerns, any advice they were given and any action to be taken.

For further information see:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/97845/human-trafficking-strategy.pdf

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/181550/Human_Trafficking_practical_guidance.pdf

<https://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/what-we-do/crime-threats/modern-slavery-and-human-trafficking>

<https://www.ecpat.org.uk/child-trafficking-in-the-uk-2020-snapshot>

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/child-trafficking/>

<https://www.savethechildren.org/us/charity-stories/child-trafficking-myths-vs-facts>

Helpline:

Child Trafficking Advice Centre - help@nspcc.gov.uk or call 0808 800 5000

Connected Policies or Guidance

Name of Policy / Guidance	Relevant for
Record Keeping and Confidentiality policy	All staff and carers
Safeguarding Policy	All staff and carers
Safeguarding children from child sexual exploitation policy	All staff and carers
Safeguarding children from Criminal Exploitation including County Lines'	Foster Carers, Placement Managers
Foster Carer Handbook	Foster Carers, Placement Managers

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