



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 they 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 Referral Mechanism (NRM) which was set up in 2009 to help identify and support victims, and, in March 2023 the following was reported for 2022:

- There were 6,938 potential victims of modern slavery referred to the Home Office in 2022, representing a 33% increase compared to the preceding year and the highest annual number since 2009
- Overall, of the 16,938 potential victims referred in this year, 78% (13,290) were male and 21% (3,634) were female.
- the large increase in referrals from government agency first responders has driven this increase which could be linked to the increase in detections at the border and, particularly, the large increase in small boat arrivals.
- Albanian nationals overtook UK nationals as the most commonly referred nationality in 2022, 27% (4,613) of, with Eritrean nationals being the third most referred (7%; 1,171)
- The Home Office received 4,580 reports of adult potential victims via the Duty to Notify process, the highest annual number since the Duty to Notify began

Child trafficking is child abuse where victims 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
- 'County Lines' drug dealing
- Organ harvesting

Many children are trafficked into the UK from abroad, but they can also be trafficked from one part of the UK to another, this accounting for 49% of victims in 2022. Physical, sexual and emotional abuse are often used to control victims of trafficking and many children are likely to be physically and emotionally harmed. As a crime, child trafficking is 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 the telling of their experiences, having been threatened by those who have trafficked them. Many victims don't speak English. Children are often too scared to speak out because they are frightened of:

- What will happen to them, their friends and family
- A lack of trust in adults and the 'authorities'
- 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 they will feel distressed and alienated if they have been separated from their families, friends, communities and culture. Trafficked 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 and mental health. Those 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, published in 2014, outlines the inter-agency response to human trafficking with a focus on the need to raise awareness of child trafficking and ensure victims are treated as in need of child protection. All children in care are vulnerable, but those who have been subjected to trafficking require Social Workers and Foster Parents to be vigilant. Risk Assessment and Reduction Plans need to be robust and regularly reviewed, as does the foster 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. Victims may not feel able to share their fears, but changes in their behaviour and/or mood and presentation should be noted and reported to their Social Worker and the Fostering Social Worker.

Action to be taken

If a child discloses that they have been trafficked, or held against their will at any time, Foster Parents and Fostering Social Workers must:

- Follow AFA child protection procedures, contacting the Designated Safeguarding Lead or, in their absence, a Senior Manager.
- Contact the Police if it is deemed that a child is at immediate risk, as should the child’s Social Worker, their Line Manager or the Duty Worker.
- Not question the child but record any information they give as soon as possible.
- Make a detailed record of who they spoke to regarding their concerns including 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/news/child-victims-of-trafficking-share-their-experiences-and-call-for-change-as-the-uk-government-continues-to-attack-modern-slavery-laws>

<https://www.ecpat.org.uk/news/child-victims-of-trafficking-share-their-views-and-experiences-in-new-research>

<https://www.ecpat.org.uk/news/one-in-three-trafficked-children-go-missing-from-local-authority-care>

<https://www.ecpat.org.uk/Pages/News/Category/News>

<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 Foster Parents
Safeguarding Policy	All staff and Foster Parents
Safeguarding children from Child Sexual Exploitation	All staff and Foster Parents
Safeguarding children from Criminal Exploitation including County Lines’	Foster Parents and Fostering Social Workers
Foster Parents’ Handbook	Foster Parents and Fostering Social Workers