



Heading back to harm

A study on trafficked and unaccompanied children going missing from care in the UK



**missing
people**

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ECPAT UK is a leading children's rights organisation campaigning to protect children from child trafficking and transnational child exploitation. We support children everywhere to uphold their rights and to live a life free from abuse and exploitation. www.ecpat.org.uk

Missing People is the only charity in the UK which is dedicated to bringing missing children and adults back together with their families. We are here for missing people and their families, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year to provide free and confidential support by phone, text or email. Understanding the reasons why people go missing and the impact on families left behind enables Missing People and our partners to provide better services. Missing People's research team conducts research and evaluation projects on a range of topics. www.missingpeople.org.uk/research

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ECPAT UK is committed to youth participation; this report would not have been possible without input from the courageous members of our youth group.

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Foreword

Kevin Hyland OBE

Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner

Child survivors are among the most vulnerable victims of modern slavery, and if they are not provided the right care from the moment they are identified through to adulthood, they are at risk of falling back into exploitation or suffering further abuse and harm. Protection of trafficked children, as well as those who are at risk of being trafficked, is a priority that requires a coordinated and immediate response.

I am deeply concerned about trafficked children going missing from care and am grateful for the work that ECPAT UK, in partnership with Missing People, has put into this report to help understand the scale of the problem and how it is being responded to. Currently, not enough is known about the numbers and reasons why trafficked, unaccompanied and separated children are going missing from care, and what happens to them after they go missing. It is vitally important to have strong data collection mechanisms in order to develop an effective response to prevent these children from suffering any further abuse and exploitation.

As this report highlights, in order to prevent children from going missing from care, it is absolutely vital that there is a culture of trust

between children and those caring for them. For this trust to be fostered, professionals and carers need to be trained in order to understand and respond to any apprehensions children may have in engaging and trusting in carers, whether this be on account of a child's misplaced loyalty to a trafficker, lack of trust in authorities or because of differing cultural backgrounds.

Heading back to harm provides valuable recommendations on how to build this trust and improve the care available to trafficked, unaccompanied and separated children and also pushes for a more coordinated approach, which is absolutely vital in ensuring that there are no gaps in the system that may allow for children to fall off the radar.

The plight of trafficked, unaccompanied and separated children is complex and underlined by a myriad of causes. The more research that is carried out, the better the care and protection we can provide to at-risk children and the closer we will come to creating an environment where children feel safe and protected.

Key Terms

Absent

The National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) definition of 'absent' is: *"A person not at a place where they are expected or required to be and there is no apparent risk."* 'Absent' cases are required to be monitored over certain periods of time with consideration given to escalating to an at-risk category if the level of risk increases. The interpretation of the definition differs across police forces, making it difficult to directly compare data. From March 2015, the 'absent' category was developed to include the term 'no apparent risk'.¹

Care leaver

The Department for Education's *Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care* defines a care leaver as *"an eligible, relevant or former relevant child as defined by the Children Act 1989"*.²

Child

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 1) defines a 'child' as a person below the age of 18. 'Children' therefore means 'children and young people under the age of 18' throughout this report. Note that, where the person's age is in doubt, they must be treated as a child unless, and until, a lawful age assessment shows the person to be an adult.³

Child sexual exploitation (CSE)

The National Working Group for Sexually Exploited Children defines child sexual exploitation in the following terms: *"The sexual exploitation of children and young people under 18 involves exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where young people (or a third person or persons) receive 'something' (e.g. food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money)*

as a result of performing, and/or others performing on them, sexual activities.

*"Child sexual exploitation can occur through use of technology without the child's immediate recognition, for example the persuasion to post sexual images on the internet/mobile phones with no immediate payment or gain. In all cases those exploiting the child/young person have power over them by virtue of their age, gender, intellect, physical strength and/or economic or other resources. Violence, coercion and intimidation are common, involvement in exploitative relationships being characterised in the main by the child or young person's limited availability of choice resulting from their social/economic and/or emotional vulnerability."*⁴

Child trafficking

Child trafficking is defined as the *"recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt"* of a child for the purpose of exploitation. The internationally accepted definition of human trafficking comes from the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (2000, 'Palermo Protocol'), which the UK ratified in February 2006. Article 3 states:

"(a) 'Trafficking in persons' shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include,

¹ Association of Chief of Police Officers and College of Policing. (2013). *Interim Guidance on the Management, Recording and Investigation of Missing Persons*. Available at: <http://library.college.police.uk/docs/college-of-policing/Interim-Missing-Persons-Guidance-2013.pdf>

² Department for Education. (2014). *Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care*. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/307867/Statutory_Guidance_-_Missing_from_care__3_.pdf

³ United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. (1989).

⁴ National Working Group for Sexually Exploited Children and Young People. (2008). *How is Child Sexual Exploitation Defined?* Available at: <http://www.nwgnetwork.org/who-we-are/what-is-child-sexual-exploitation>

at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs

“(b) The consent of a victim of trafficking in persons to the intended exploitation set forth in subparagraph (a) of this article shall be irrelevant where any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a) have been used

“(c) The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered ‘trafficking in persons’ even if this does not involve any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a) of this article

“(d) ‘Child’ shall mean any person under 18 years of age.”⁵

Child in care (also referred to as looked-after child)

The Children Act 1989 defines children in care (looked-after children) in the following manner: “A child is looked after by a local authority if a court has granted a care order to place a child in care, or a council’s children’s services department has cared for the child for more than 24 hours.”⁶

County lines

According to the National Crime Agency’s *NCA Intelligence Assessment: County Lines, Gangs and Safeguarding*, “a ‘county line’ describes a situation where an individual, or more frequently a group, establishes and operates a telephone number in an area outside of their normal locality in order to sell drugs directly to users at street level. This generally involves a group from an urban area expanding their operations by crossing one or more police

force boundaries to more rural areas, setting up a secure base and using runners to conduct day to day dealing.

“A ‘county lines’ enterprise almost always involves exploitation of vulnerable persons; this can involve both children and adults who require safeguarding.”⁷

Looked-after child (also referred to as child in care)

The Department for Education’s *Statutory guidance for local authorities on the care of unaccompanied asylum seeking and trafficked children* defines a looked-after child as a “child who is looked after by a local authority by reason of a care order, or being accommodated under section 20 of the Children Act 1989”⁸.

Missing

The National Police Chiefs’ Council (NPCC) definition of missing is: “Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character to the context suggests the person may be subject of crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another.”⁹

Missing from care

For the purposes of this report, ‘missing from care’ refers to “a looked-after child who is not at their placement or the place they are expected to be (e.g., school) and their whereabouts is not known”¹⁰.

National Referral Mechanism

According to the National Crime Agency, “the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) is a framework for identifying victims of human trafficking or modern slavery and ensuring they receive the appropriate support.

⁵ Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime [‘Palermo Protocol’]. (2000).

⁶ Children Act. (1989).

⁷ National Crime Agency. (2015). *NCA Intelligence Assessment: County Lines, Gangs, and Safeguarding*. Available at: <http://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/publications/620-NCA-Intelligence-Assessment-County-Lines-Gangs-and-Safeguarding/file>

⁸ Department for Education. (2014). *Care of unaccompanied and trafficked children: Statutory guidance for local authorities on the care of unaccompanied asylum seeking and trafficked children*. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/330787/Care_of_unaccompanied_and_trafficked_children.pdf

⁹ Association of Chief Police Officers and College of Policing. (2013). *Interim Guidance on the Management, Recording and Investigation of Missing Persons*. Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/justice/fundamental-rights/files/missing_persons_guide_2013en.pdf

¹⁰ Department for Education. (2013). *Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care*. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/307867/Statutory_Guidance_-_Missing_from_care__3_.pdf

“The NRM is also the mechanism through which the Modern Slavery Human Trafficking Unit (MSHTU) collect data about victims. This information contributes to building a clearer picture about the scope of human trafficking and modern slavery in the UK.

“The NRM was introduced in 2009 to meet the UK’s obligations under the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings. At the core of every country’s NRM is the process of locating and identifying ‘potential victims of trafficking’.

“From 31 July 2015 the NRM was extended to all victims of modern slavery in England and Wales following the implementation of the Modern Slavery Act 2015.”¹¹

Repeat missing

Definitions of ‘repeat missing’ vary across police forces. A number of forces define ‘repeat missing’ as three times or more in a 90-day period, but others include anyone who has been missing more than once. Some forces do not have a definition at all. The identification of ‘repeat missing’ is important as this is often the threshold set for triggering inter-agency intervention. For the purpose of this report ‘repeat missing’ relates to a child who goes missing on more than one occasion.¹²

Separated child

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child defines a separated child as *“a child who has been separated from both parents, or from their previous legal or customary caregiver, but not necessarily from other relatives. This may, therefore, include a child accompanied by other adult family members”¹³.*

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking child (UASC)

The Department for Education’s *Statutory guidance for local authorities on the care of unaccompanied asylum seeking and trafficked children* defines an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child as a *“child who is applying for asylum in their own right and is separated from both parents and is not being cared for by an adult who in law or by custom has responsibility to do so”¹⁴.*

Unaccompanied child

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child defines an unaccompanied child as a *“child who has been separated from both parents and other relatives and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for doing so”¹⁵.* This report refers to separated, unaccompanied and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children collectively as ‘unaccompanied children’.

¹¹ National Crime Agency. (2016). “National Referral Mechanism”. Available at: <http://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/about-us/what-we-do/specialist-capabilities/uk-human-trafficking-centre/national-referral-mechanism>

¹² HMIC. (2016). *Missing children: who cares? The police response to missing and ‘absent’ children*. Available at: <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmic/wp-content/uploads/missing-children-who-cares.pdf>

¹³ United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. (1989).

¹⁴ Department for Education. (2014). *Care of unaccompanied and trafficked children: Statutory guidance for local authorities on the care of unaccompanied asylum seeking and trafficked children*. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/330787/Care_of_unaccompanied_and_trafficked_children.pdf

¹⁵ United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. (1989).

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Executive summary

Research context

Child victims of trafficking are at high risk of going missing.¹⁶ Despite this, concerns have been raised about a lack of awareness and recognition of child trafficking among practitioners.¹⁷ The European police agency, Europol, recently warned that there are as many as 10,000 ‘missing’ or unaccounted for unaccompanied children in the European Union, which has drawn attention to those under 18 who are known to be ‘particularly vulnerable’¹⁸ to trafficking and exploitation. The vulnerability of unaccompanied children from abroad who are in the UK is often increased by a lack of knowledge or integration into their new environment, and by being subject to child protection, immigration and law enforcement responses.¹⁹ This research attempts to quantify the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and children who may be trafficked in the UK care system, as well as the number who go missing from care.

Through this year-long study, ECPAT UK and Missing People have discovered that an alarmingly high number of both unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and children who may have been trafficked go missing from care. Many have not been found. Local authorities with responsibility for the care of these children are frequently not able to report how many unaccompanied and trafficked children are in their care, and many failed to identify any child trafficking victims.

Poor data collection and recording at a local level is deeply concerning and suggests that the UK’s wider child protection response to child victims of trafficking, in particular, is inadequate. We have found that there is much more that could be done to keep these children ‘visible’ in the system, to prevent them from going missing and to respond effectively in order to keep them safe from further harm.

Heading back to harm reveals that, from September 2014 to September 2015, **28% of trafficked children (167 children)** in care and **13% of unaccompanied children (593 children)** in care went missing at least once. Of these, **207** missing trafficked or unaccompanied children had not been found.

This research has identified a worrying lack of consistency in the way in which local authorities identify and record risk of trafficking and exploitation. Identification of trafficking is also a challenge in the UK at local level, despite the creation in 2009 of a National Referral Mechanism (NRM) to identify victims. Therefore, the true number of trafficked and unaccompanied children going missing is likely to be far higher than our findings suggest.

¹⁶ Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP). (2010). *Strategic Threat Assessment: Child Trafficking in the UK*. Available at: https://www.ceop.police.uk/Documents/ceopdocs/Child_Trafficking_Strategic_Threat_Assessment_2010_NPM_Final.pdf

¹⁷ Refugee Council and The Children’s Society. (2013). *Still at Risk? A review of support for trafficked children*. Available at: https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/assets/0002/9408/Still_at_Risk-Report-final.pdf

¹⁸ Directive 2011/36/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims. (2011).

¹⁹ Missing Children Europe. (2016). *SUMMIT Handbook: Practical guidance on preventing and responding to unaccompanied children going missing*. Available at: <http://missingchildreneurope.eu/Portals/0/Docs/Practical%20guidance%20on%20preventing%20and%20responding%20to%20unaccompanied%20children%20going%20missing.pdf>

Methodology

Heading back to harm aims to discover how many trafficked and unaccompanied children have gone missing from care in the UK – and why – using four approaches to data collection:

- 1. Data requests to 217 local authorities across the UK** (under the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act 2000) asking how many trafficked or unaccompanied children went missing from care in the year to September 2015
- 2. Two workshops with young people who have been child victims of trafficking**
- 3. Roundtable with multi-agency frontline practitioners**
- 4. Online survey of practitioners and policymakers**

Key findings

Numbers of children identified/suspected as trafficked and unaccompanied children in care in the UK, Sept 2014-15

590

Children identified/suspected as trafficked

4,744

Unaccompanied children

- London, the South East, East Anglia and the East and West Midlands accounted for **75% (445)** of the 590 trafficked children and **90% (4,267)** of the total 4,744 of unaccompanied children.
- Other areas of the UK reported lower numbers, including:
 - **14** trafficked and **57** unaccompanied children in care in Wales
 - **13** trafficked and **20** unaccompanied children in care in Northern Ireland
 - **48** trafficked and **150** unaccompanied children in care in Scotland
- Responses from London authorities showed considerable variance between boroughs. Despite London being a key destination for human traffickers, **10 of 33** London authorities reported no trafficked children and a further 4 could provide no information. This prompts concerns about low identification, training and recording practices in these areas.

Trafficked and unaccompanied children missing from care

- **28% (167)** of the 590 children suspected or identified as trafficked went missing at least once, from 39 UK local authorities. In comparison, previous research has estimated that around one in 10 of all children go missing before the age of 16.²⁰ The highest number of trafficked children reported as missing from one local authority was **22** (the mean average was 4 across the 39 authorities who reported missing children).
- Of the 4,744 unaccompanied children, **13% (593)** went missing at least once, from 74 local authorities. One authority reported **190 (19%)** of their 985 unaccompanied children having gone missing.
- The data reveals **331** missing incidents for the 167 trafficked children who went missing, and **994** incidents for the 593 unaccompanied children who went missing. Both equate to a rate of around **2.4 incidents per child**.
- Local authorities in Wales reported that **none** of their 14 trafficked children and **2** of their 57 unaccompanied children went missing (1 permanently). Scotland reported that **2** of 48 trafficked children and **3** of 150 unaccompanied children went missing (1 permanently). In Northern Ireland, **7** out of 13 children identified/suspected as trafficked went missing and **2** out of 20 unaccompanied children went missing.

Duration of missing episodes

- Trafficked and unaccompanied children go missing for longer periods than other missing children. Nationally, previous research has shown that just 2% of missing children are away for more than a week.²¹ Yet *Heading back to harm* shows that **around a third** of trafficked and unaccompanied children **are missing for more than a week**.
- 45 local authorities provided information on how many missing trafficked and unaccompanied children remained unfound. Across these 45 authorities, **207** trafficked or unaccompanied children were unaccounted for and missing. The highest number in a single authority was **53** children.

Nationality

- Only 10 local authorities were able to provide detailed information about nationality. From these areas, the highest recorded numbers were from **Vietnam** (12 children) and the second highest **British** (10 children).
- **60%** of respondents to our survey of professionals thought a trafficked child's nationality had a bearing on how likely they were to go missing. And **45%** believed it had an impact on the likelihood of an unaccompanied asylum seeking child going missing.

²⁰ Rees, G. (2011). *Still Running 3: Early findings from our third national survey of young runaways, 2011*. Available at: http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/tcs/u32/still-running_3_report.pdf

²¹ National Crime Agency Missing Persons Bureau. (2016). *Missing Persons Data Report 2015-16*. Available at: <http://missingpersons.police.uk/en/resources/missing-persons-data-report-2015-16>

Reasons for going missing

We asked both young people and respondents to our survey of professionals to tell us why trafficked and unaccompanied children go missing from care. They suggested the following reasons, in descending order:

Young people's views

- Control/influence of traffickers
- Lack of trust in adults who are there to keep you safe
- Lack of consistent support from a trusted individual, such as an independent advocate or guardian
- Lack of connection with foster carers
- Feeling isolated, like you don't belong
- Lack of engagement with school, social networks
- Fear of not being believed, and maybe being deported
- Uncertain immigration status
- Stressful procedures, such as age assessments and official interviews

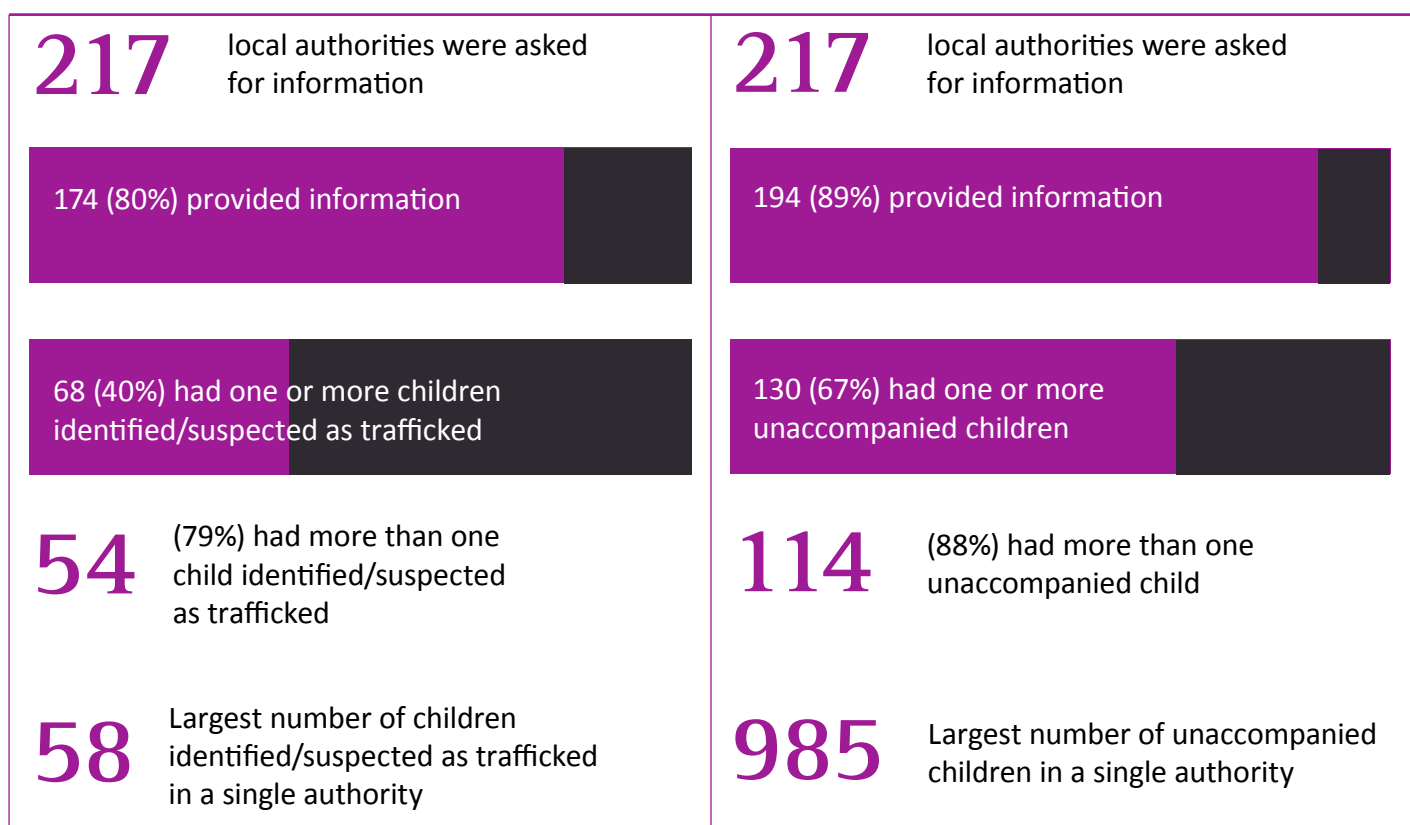
Professionals' views

- Children not being identified as trafficked
- Control/influence of traffickers
- Unsuitable care placements
- Lack of consistent support from a trusted individual/specialist support (including independent advocacy)
- Poor protection measures
- Asylum and immigration concerns (highest rated reason for unaccompanied children)

Local authorities' ability to report

Children identified/suspected as trafficked, Sept 2014-15

Unaccompanied children, Sept 2014-15



Those councils that could not provide information cited an exemption to the Freedom of Information Act, which allows public bodies not to respond to requests where the cost of responding would “*exceed the appropriate limit*”²².

Many local authorities remain unable to report numbers from their area. The most common reason they gave for declining to respond was not having a searchable data field for trafficking on

case management systems. As a direct result of our data request, a number of local authorities have acknowledged shortcomings in their recording practice, and have committed to improve their systems accordingly.

Data collected from local authorities for this research should be considered in the context of known challenges around identifying victims of trafficking, training of frontline workers and inconsistent recording practices.

²² Freedom of Information Act. (2000).

Identification and age assessment

Not being identified as a potential victim of trafficking was found to be a key risk to a child going missing from care. Practitioners' low awareness and use of the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) – the UK's framework for identifying victims of modern slavery and trafficking – was frequently cited as an issue for concern. The impact of a child not being identified as at risk or believed if they disclosed trafficking indicators was seen to compound their risk of going missing. In addition, this research indicates that disputes over age have a strong influence on whether a child feels believed by authorities and the trust developed with professionals. In addition, it can strongly influence the type of support and accommodation they receive, which, in turn, is thought to affect their risk of going missing from care.

Child sexual exploitation

British children are the third most prominent nationality recorded as trafficking victims in NRM data for 2015, and the second most reported group in our local authority data. The majority of this group are girls who have been trafficked for sexual exploitation.²³ The trafficking of UK children is often linked to child sexual exploitation, which can be both a cause and a consequence of going missing. From our study, 10 local authorities gave further information relating to the nationality or gender of children identified or suspected of being trafficked who had gone missing and, from this data, British children were the second most commonly identified nationality.

A perception that white British girls were more vulnerable to going or staying missing was strongly evident in the survey of professionals, although 42% of the respondents stated that British children were, in their experience, 'rarely' or 'never' recorded as trafficked. It appears that many British victims of child sexual exploitation (CSE) are not being referred to the NRM and being identified as victims of trafficking. This may be due to a lack of understanding of the definition of trafficking, with many practitioners thinking it affects only those who cross international borders.

County lines

In recent years the identification of 'county lines' (drug supply networks extending out from cities to smaller towns or coastal resorts) has started to be viewed as potential child trafficking.²⁴ While these children are involved in criminal activity, they may also be in exploitative situations whereby older people give them 'payment' of some sort in return for this criminal activity or pressure/groom them to be involved. Local authority respondents to our survey identified this issue as a gap in their knowledge.

Criminalisation

There was a perception amongst our survey respondents that being criminalised (for example, being arrested or prosecuted) makes trafficked children more likely to go missing. 65% of respondents from the not-for-profit sector and 38% from the criminal justice sector agreed that criminalisation 'usually' or 'sometimes' has an impact. Concern was raised that the children's criminality was prioritised over their vulnerability, both in terms of preventing missing but also after the child had gone missing and during the missing investigation.

²³ National Crime Agency. (2016). *National Referral Mechanism – End of Year Summary 2015*. Available at: <http://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/publications/676-national-referral-mechanism-statistics-end-of-year-summary-2015/file>

²⁴ Sturrock, R. and Holmes, L. (2015). *Running the Risks: The links between gang involvement and young people going missing*. Catch 22 and Missing People. Available at: <https://www.missingpeople.org.uk/runningtherisks>

Summary of recommendations

As a result both of the data collection and data analysis for this project, we make three sets of recommendations: creating a culture of trust; responding to risk; and taking a coordinated approach. Further detail on each recommendation is outlined in the main report.

1. Creating a culture of trust

Recommendation 1: Child-specific training for professionals and carers to address the lack of awareness of the issues and risks faced by trafficked, unaccompanied and separated children. To ensure that care providers understand and respond to the needs of children effectively, frontline professionals working with children must be trained to an appropriate level with child protection training on trafficking/modern slavery.

Recommendation 2: Building a culture of trust with trafficked, unaccompanied and separated children to prevent them going missing by ensuring that a child's first and subsequent encounters with agencies and services are supportive and that next steps are clearly explained, including provision of peer support and regard to their cultural needs.

Recommendation 3: Independent Child Trafficking Advocates or Guardians must be urgently rolled out nationally to ensure an effective national system of legal, independent guardianship for all of these children across the UK, which will protect their rights and promote their wellbeing.

2. Responding to risk

Recommendation 4: Safe and appropriate accommodation/placements should be resourced and available for all trafficked, unaccompanied and separated children, in order to build trust, promote wellbeing and prevent missing incidents.

Safety planning must include young people from the beginning. In addition, the Government must publish detailed plans and a timetable for an independent review of local authority support for all trafficked children.

Recommendation 5: Risk assessment by statutory agencies must be thorough, timely and responsive, and shared appropriately with relevant agencies, both to inform care planning and to guide the response to missing incidents for all trafficked, unaccompanied and separated children. All trafficked, unaccompanied and separated children who go missing must be assigned a 'high-risk' status, regardless of any ongoing criminal investigation. Those turning 18 must not be deprioritised.

3. Taking a coordinated approach

Recommendation 6: Improved data recording and reporting to ensure that patterns and prevalence of trafficked, unaccompanied and separated children going missing from care are monitored locally, regionally and nationally to inform resource allocation, risk management and effective responses. The NRM must be reformed to ensure a child protection response to trafficking risk, as well as guaranteed specialist support for those identified as trafficked or at risk of trafficking.

Recommendation 7: National, regional and local coordination must take place in order to understand and respond to changes in the local, regional and national patterns of trafficked, unaccompanied and separated children going missing from care; statutory and voluntary agencies must work together effectively.



**"We are nobody
in this country."**

– Member of ECPAT UK youth group for young victims of trafficking

1 Introduction

About this research

Heading back to harm aims to examine the scale of and response to unaccompanied, separated and trafficked children going missing from care in the UK. Each chapter addresses a key area of interest: the scale of the issue; the nature of the links between trafficking and going missing; interventions and best practice; and recommendations for practitioners and policymakers.

ECPAT UK and Missing People have been concerned about the number of cases reported to them of children who have been, or are at risk of being, trafficked and who go missing from care. There is, however, no centrally collected data on child victims of trafficking who go missing from care in the UK, making it impossible to know the true scale of the problem.

A recent study, which attempted to map the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children going missing in England, found that unaccompanied children *“increasingly are accommodated outside the local authority with statutory responsibility to support them”* but that *“receiving local authorities are rarely*

*informed of these transfers and keep no record of unaccompanied minors placed from other local authorities”*²⁵.

Heading back to harm sought to address some of the gaps in knowledge around this cohort of children (trafficked and unaccompanied) by conducting Freedom of Information (FOI) requests to all local authorities with responsibility for children’s social care in the UK.

Identification of trafficking and modern slavery remains poor in the UK, despite the creation in 2009 of a National Referral Mechanism (NRM), operated by the Home Office and the Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Unit²⁶ of the National Crime Agency (NCA), to identify adult and child victims. A 2014 Home Office review of the NRM found it was *“a disjointed system where awareness of human trafficking was often low and of the NRM processes still lower”*²⁷. The NCA has estimated that as many as 65% of victims of trafficking were not referred into the NRM in 2012.²⁸ To compound this problem for young people, child trafficking is said to have a *“lower profile”* than that of adult trafficking.²⁹

²⁵ Humphris R. and Signa N. (2016). *Becoming Adult: Mapping unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in England*. Available at: <https://becomingadultproject.files.wordpress.com/2016/07/research-brief-series-01-2016.pdf>

²⁶ Formerly the UK Human Trafficking Centre

²⁷ Home Office. (2014). *Review of the National Referral Mechanism for victims of human trafficking*. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/467434/Review_of_the_National_Referral_Mechanism_for_victims_of_human_trafficking.pdf

²⁸ UK Human Trafficking Centre. (2013). *Serious Organised Crime Agency: Intelligence Assessment: UKHTC: Strategic Assessment on the Nature and Scale of Human Trafficking in 2012*. Available at: <http://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/publications/15-ukhtc-strategic-assessment-on-human-trafficking-in-2012/file>

²⁹ The Anti-Trafficking Monitoring Group. (2013). *In the Dock: Examining the UK’s Criminal Justice Response to Trafficking*. Available at: http://www.ecpat.org.uk/sites/default/files/in_the_dock_atmg_2013.pdf

Trafficking is a growing global crime, with an estimated 1.2 million child victims trafficked every year.³⁰ According to NCA statistics, children, on average, make up around a quarter of victims who are discovered in the UK. In 2015, the NCA recorded almost 1,000 referrals of potential child victims to the NRM.³¹ However, the Government estimates there are closer to 13,000 victims of trafficking and modern slavery in the UK, with around 3,000 of these thought to be children.³²

Which children?

The report concerns the circumstances of children aged under 18 who go missing from care and who fall within the following four groups:

1 Those suspected to be, or identified as, a trafficked child

2 Separated children who are separated from their parents, or from their legal or customary primary care-giver (although not necessarily from other relatives). This group may include children accompanied by other adult family members

3 Unaccompanied children who have been separated from their parents and other relatives and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for doing so

4 Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (also known as UASC) who are under 18 and applying for asylum in their own right, who are separated from their parents and are not being cared for by an adult who by law has responsibility to do so

³⁰ International Labor Office. (2002). *Every Child Counts: New Global Estimates on Child Labour*. Available at: <http://www.ilo.org/ippecinfo/product/download.do?type=document&id=742>

³¹ National Crime Agency. (2016). *National Referral Mechanism – End of Year Summary 2015*. Available at: <http://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/publications/676-national-referral-mechanism-statistics-end-of-year-summary-2015/file>

³² Home Office. (2014). *Modern Slavery Strategy*. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/383764/Modern_Slavery_Strategy_Final_DEC2015.pdf

While it is important to understand the overlap between these groups of children, it is unhelpful to conflate them. For example, trafficked children are not always unaccompanied and they may not always claim asylum; they may be European Union or British nationals and, therefore, not be subject to immigration control. Conversely, not all unaccompanied children are victims of trafficking, although being unaccompanied significantly increases their vulnerability to exploitation.

This research has explored the issue of these groups of children going missing from care and references existing legislative and policy context across the UK as it relates to trafficked, unaccompanied and separated children in care. This report refers to the subject group as unaccompanied children and child victims of trafficking (or trafficked children) throughout.

1.1 What do we know about trafficked and unaccompanied children going missing?

Legislation and policy context

The UK has signed up to various international treaties and frameworks on the issue of child protection and, more specifically, trafficking and abuse, which set out legal duties on the UK concerning the protection of victims, the prosecution of offenders and prevention of abuse. It has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), which enshrines governments' responsibilities towards all children within their jurisdiction, regardless of nationality and immigration status, and obliges *"states to take positive action to protect children [anyone under 18 years old] from all forms of exploitation and sexual abuse"*. In 2008, the Government lifted its Reservation on Article 22 of the Convention with regards to immigration and nationality, meaning that the principles within the Convention are applied to all children, irrespective of their immigration status. This enshrines the principle that all children have the same rights in the UK, no matter their nationality or immigration status.

Although the UNCRC has not been directly incorporated into UK domestic law, the principles guide domestic law and practice, and are often referred to by the courts when interpreting obligations imposed by human rights and other legislation. Despite this, the UK Government has been criticised over its compliance with the UNCRC in key areas, with specific reference to failures around migrant and trafficked children.³³

In addition to the UNCRC, the UK has also signed the additional Optional Protocol on the *"the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography... developed to provide more detailed obligations regarding the protection of child victims of trafficking"*³⁴, and ratified the ILO Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour.

³³ House of Lords, House of Commons Joint Committee on Human Rights. (2015). *The UK's compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child Eighth Report of Session 2014–15*. Available at: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/jt201415/jtselect/jtrights/144/144.pdf>

³⁴ United Nations Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. (2002).

The UK is a signatory to specific international legislation on trafficking, including the UN Trafficking Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (known as the Palermo Protocol) and the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (2008). In 2011, the UK ratified the EU Directive on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims (2011/36/EU), which came into force in 2013.

Last year, the Modern Slavery Act (England & Wales) 2015, the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 and the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Scotland) Act 2015 entered into force in the UK. These Acts introduced new offences of modern slavery and human trafficking, as well as various provisions aimed at preventing modern slavery and protecting its victims.

Statutory guidance to accompany these pieces of legislation is currently being drafted across the various parts of the UK. However, there are a number of policy documents aimed at protecting unaccompanied and trafficked children already in existence. In England, this includes practice guidance on *Safeguarding children who may have been trafficked* (2011) and *Statutory guidance for local authorities on the care of unaccompanied asylum seeking and trafficked children* (2014), which is currently being updated. In Scotland, there is *Safeguarding Children in Scotland who may have been Trafficked* (2009) and in Northern Ireland, *Working Arrangements for the Welfare and Safeguarding of Child Victims of Human Trafficking* (2011). In Wales, there is the *All Wales Practice Guidance for Safeguarding Children Who May Have Been Trafficked* (2011).

The Home Office has guidance on *Processing children's asylum claims* (updated in July 2016) and *National Referral Mechanism: guidance for child first responders* (updated in March 2016). All of the above set out the specific needs of unaccompanied children and child victims of trafficking, as well as safeguarding duties with regard to this cohort of young people.

In 2014, the Department for Education published updated *Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care* (applicable in England and Wales), which contains a dedicated chapter for those looked-after children who may have been trafficked from abroad. It states:

“Some looked-after children are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children or other migrant children. Some of this group may have been trafficked into the UK and may remain under the influence of their traffickers even while they are looked after. Trafficked children are at high risk of going missing, with most going missing within one week of becoming looked after and many within 48 hours. Unaccompanied migrant or asylum-seeking children who go missing immediately after becoming looked after should be treated as potential victims of trafficking.”³⁵

In June 2016, the Government stated it was “taking forward plans to review local authority support for non-European economic area migrant children who have been trafficked”³⁶. However, it is not clear what action has taken place since this announcement and this review appears to be very limited, concerning only those children who have been trafficked from outside of Europe.

Established link between trafficking and missing

The NCA Missing Persons Bureau gathers and information from police forces individually. In 2015-16, it found that police forces in England and Wales recorded 181,954 missing and ‘absent’ incidents, involving at least 67,471 individual children – an increase of around 20% from the previous year.³⁷ In this police data, children aged 15-17 were the age group most likely to be reported missing (accounting for 60% of all missing child incidents) and girls under 18 were more often recorded missing than boys (52% to 47%).³⁸

Children in the care system are three times more likely to go missing than children not in care.³⁹ Children and young people are known to be at risk of going missing as a result of grooming for exploitative means, trafficking and sexual exploitation,⁴⁰ and it is thought that approximately 25% of children and young people that do go missing for more than 24 hours are at risk of serious harm.⁴¹

³⁵ Department for Education. (2013). *Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care*. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/307867/Statutory_Guidance_-_Missing_/from_care__3_.pdf

³⁶ House of Commons Hansard. (28 June 2016). “Independent Advocates for Trafficked Children”. Available at: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2016-06-28/debates/16062854000001/IndependentAdvocatesForTraffickedChildren>

³⁷ National Crime Agency Missing Persons Bureau. (2016). *Missing Persons Data Report 2015-16*. Available at: <http://missingpersons.police.uk/en/resources/missing-persons-data-report-2015-16>

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ Ofsted. (2013). *Missing Children*. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/419144/Missing_children.pdf

⁴⁰ Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP). (2010). *Strategic Threat Assessment: Child Trafficking in the UK*. Available at: https://www.ceop.police.uk/Documents/ceopdocs/Child_Trafficking_Strategic_Threat_Assessment_2010_NPM_Final.pdf

⁴¹ Department for Education. (2014). *Care of unaccompanied and trafficked children: Statutory guidance for local authorities on the care of unaccompanied asylum seeking and trafficked children*. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/330787/Care_of_unaccompanied_and_trafficked_children.pdf

Trafficked children are considered to be at a high risk of going missing, and previous data collected by the National Crime Agency's CEOP Command⁴² confirmed significant numbers went missing whilst in the care system.⁴³ Early concerns about trafficked children going missing from local authority care were highlighted in research by ECPAT UK in 2001, which called for improved measures of safe accommodation for these children⁴⁴ and as early as 1998 in the media.⁴⁵ Research in 2007 by ECPAT UK found that nearly two-thirds (60%) of child victims of trafficking from a sample population in the North West, North East and West Midlands went missing from care; nearly one-third went missing within a week of entering care, and the majority were not found.⁴⁶ Further concerns were raised in a 2009 Home Affairs Select Committee report on human trafficking, which highlighted that traffickers may be using the *"care home system for vulnerable children as holding pens for their victims until they are ready to pick them up"*⁴⁷.

There have been several media reports about missing unaccompanied and trafficked children, which have highlighted the continuing problem across the UK of children going missing from care.

Case study: Re-trafficking

Two teenage girls from Nigeria were trafficked to the UK for sexual exploitation and were re-trafficked to Spain after going missing from care. The girls, both orphans, were 15 but were smuggled into the UK on false passports saying they were adults. They were told they were coming to the UK for a better life and to get work experience for a job. They were also subjected to a 'juju' ritual to swear obedience to their traffickers. On arrival in the UK, the fake passports were noticed by officials and the girls were put into foster care. They disappeared a few months later on their way to church. They were booked on to flights to Spain and flew out of the country as police looked for them. One of the girls was intercepted in Spain after being stopped by authorities there. She was returned to the UK and remained in her placement. The other girl was never found but a sighting was reported of her in France.⁴⁸ It is thought she was sold into sexual exploitation in Europe. Their case was described by police as a *"sophisticated, organised human trafficking operation which preyed upon vulnerable children for commercial gain"*.⁴⁹ The police stated they would continue to look for her.

⁴² Formerly the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP)

⁴³ Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP). (2010). *Strategic Threat Assessment: Child Trafficking in the UK*. Available at: https://www.ceop.police.uk/Documents/ceopdocs/Child_Trafficking_Strategic_Threat_Assessment_2010_NPM_Final.pdf

⁴⁴ ECPAT UK. (2001). *What the Professionals Know: The trafficking of children into, and through, the UK for sexual purposes*. Available at: http://www.ecpat.org.uk/sites/default/files/what_the_professionals_know_2001.pdf

⁴⁵ Crawley Observer. (11 February 1998). *"Teens Lured into Ring of Vice" Fear*.

⁴⁶ ECPAT UK. (2007). *Missing Out*. Available at: http://www.ecpat.org.uk/sites/default/files/missing_out_2007.pdf

⁴⁷ Home Affairs Select Committee. (2009). *The Trade in Human Beings: Human Trafficking in the UK*. Available at: <https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmselect/cmhaff/23/23i.pdf>

⁴⁸ The Argus. (16 March 2013). *"Tragic tale of orphan girls trafficked in Sussex for sex in sordid crime racket"*. Available at: http://www.theargus.co.uk/news/10294001.Tragic_tale_of_orphan_girls_trafficked_in_Sussex_for_sex_in_sordid_crime_racket/

⁴⁹ Ibid

ECPAT UK has consistently highlighted a lack of commonly agreed safety and protection standards for the placement of children who are suspected or known to be trafficked. Therefore, it formulated 10 child-centred principles concerning the provision of safe accommodation for child victims of trafficking in its 2011 report *On the Safe Side: Principles for the safe accommodation of child victims of trafficking*.

Yet despite the acknowledged links, very little data on missing trafficked children has been collected.

In a recent evaluation of the Home Office's trial of Child Trafficking Advocates in 23 local authority areas, 72 children (46%) had at least one missing episode recorded. Out of these 72, there were 27 children who remained missing – 38% of those who had gone missing or 17% of the whole cohort of children).⁵⁰

A recent report by Europol estimated there are as many as 10,000 'missing' or unaccounted for unaccompanied children in the European Union, and those under 18 are known to be 'particularly vulnerable' to trafficking and exploitation.⁵¹ The United Nations has also recently drawn attention to the plight of unaccompanied children living in the Calais 'Jungle' camp with UNICEF warning about the risk of children there falling prey to traffickers.⁵²

Research suggests that up to 50% of the unaccompanied children accommodated go missing from certain reception centres in the EU⁵³ and, in many cases, information about the child's whereabouts remains unknown. As reported by Europol, there is a "tremendous amount of crossover" between smugglers transporting refugees across borders and gangs ensnaring people for forced sexual and labour exploitation.⁵⁴

Concerns about serious shortcomings in the identification of child victims of trafficking within Europe has been noted by the Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA) in both of its two evaluations of the UK's response to human trafficking. It stated:

“Despite many positive developments in recent years, estimates suggest that up to 60% of children who have potentially been trafficked are still going missing from local authority care in the UK, usually within 48 hours of being placed in care and before being formally recognised as victims. Children who go missing in one part of the UK can also end up being trafficked and exploited in another part of the country, without any connection being made.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Kohli, R. et al. (2015). *Evaluation of Independent Child Trafficking Advocates trial: Final Report*. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/486138/icta-horr86.pdf

⁵¹ Directive 2011/36/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims. (2011).

⁵² UNICEF. (2016). "UNICEF UK response to confirmation of Calais camp demolition". Available at: <http://www.unicef.org.uk/Media-centre/Press-releases/UNICEF-UK-response-to-confirmation-of-Calais-camp-demolition/>

⁵³ Missing Children Europe. (2016). "Europol confirms the disappearance of 10,000 migrant children in Europe". Available at: <http://missingchildreneurope.eu/news/Post/1023/Europol-confirms-the-disappearance-of-10-000-migrant-children-in-Europe>

⁵⁴ Europol via The Guardian. (2015). "Unaccompanied young refugees in Europe 'at risk from criminal gangs'". Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/01/unaccompanied-young-refugees-europe-traffickers>

⁵⁵ GRETA Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings. (2016). *Report concerning the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings by the United Kingdom: Second Evaluation Round*. Available at: <http://www.coe.int/en/web/anti-human-trafficking/-/uk-urged-to-improve-protection-of-child-victims-of-human-trafficking>

In GRETA's first-round evaluation of the UK response in 2012, it warned:

“The inadequacy of child protection measures and the lack of coordination at national level as well as between countries increase the risk of unaccompanied children falling victim to trafficking. In most countries there is little or no information on the identification of trafficked persons among separated children.”⁵⁶

There are a number of factors that heighten the risk of trafficked children going missing, including fear, violence, debt bondage, grooming and child sexual exploitation (CSE), and social isolation. Trafficked children often go missing and return to their traffickers, never to be seen again, because they are *“groomed so effectively by their traffickers that the children are so terrified of what might happen to them or their families if they break their bond or tell the authorities”⁵⁷*. For unaccompanied asylum-seeking or separated children, their vulnerability is enhanced by a *“cultural disorientation, a lack of knowledge and integration in the new environment, together with their situation regarding the immigration laws”⁵⁸*.

Children from abroad are often left in a precarious position, one where child protection, immigration rules and law enforcement responses intersect.⁵⁹ A 2012 joint inquiry by parliamentarians found that *“trafficked children from abroad were being particularly let down and their needs ignored because the authorities view child trafficking as an immigration control issue”⁶⁰*.

In light of this vulnerability, it is vital that the UK's safeguarding response to potential child victims

of trafficking and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in its care is appropriate and as robust as it can be. The Government is currently rolling out a national transfer protocol scheme to encourage *“a fairer distribution of unaccompanied children across all local authorities and all regions across the UK”⁶¹*. It has been set up to *“ensure that any local authority does not face an unmanageable responsibility in accommodating and looking after unaccompanied children”⁶²*. While the government seeks to distribute numbers of children more equitably, it is essential that knowledge and expertise amongst statutory service providers and carers is robust and consistent.

Aims of this research

Despite the recognised links between trafficked or unaccompanied children and going missing, there has been little in the way of a coordinated approach to mapping and reporting on the issue locally and nationally. Therefore, *Heading back to harm* aims to better understand the scale of the problem and explore the reasons behind the phenomenon in order to propose effective prevention methods and solutions. The key aims of this research project are:

To gather better and more comprehensive data and analysis of the number of trafficked and unaccompanied children who have gone missing from care

To build greater understanding of the challenges around the collection and recording of information on trafficked and unaccompanied children in the UK care system

⁵⁶ GRETA Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings. (2016). *5th General Report on Activities*. Available at: http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/trafficking/Docs/Gen_Report/GRETA_2016_1_Web_en.pdf

⁵⁷ All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults and the APPG for Looked-After Children and Care Leavers. (2012). *Report from the joint inquiry into children who go missing from care*. Available at: https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/tcs/u32/joint_appg_inquiry_-_report...pdf

⁵⁸ Missing Children Europe. (2016).

⁵⁹ Ibid

⁶⁰ All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults and the APPG for Looked-After Children and Care Leavers. (2012). *Report from the joint inquiry into children who go missing from care*. Available at: https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/tcs/u32/joint_appg_inquiry_-_report...pdf

⁶¹ Department for Education, Home Office and Department for Communities and Local Government. (2016). *Interim National Transfer Protocol for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children 2016-17*. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/534258/Interim_National_UASC_transfer_protocol.pdf

⁶² Ibid

To gain insight into the views of practitioners working with trafficked and unaccompanied children, and young people themselves, on the reasons behind disappearances and the responses to missing episodes

To develop practical advice and recommendations to inform measures to prevent unaccompanied children who may have been trafficked from going missing

Our research is based on a mixture of qualitative and quantitative data. This includes data collected from local authorities with responsibility for children's social care in the UK, as well as a survey of key professionals, a roundtable with frontline practitioners from various disciplines and feedback from young people who have been trafficked. Analysis focused on learning about the areas of the UK most affected, about the possible links between the characteristics of those children going missing, about the reasons why children may disappear and what an effective response might look like.

Methodology

This research project involved four approaches to data collection:

1. Requests for data from local authorities, made under the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act 2000
2. Two workshops with young former child victims of trafficking
3. An evidence-gathering roundtable with practitioners
4. An online survey of practitioners and policymakers

1. Analysis of local authority data

The research team made a request for data under the Freedom of Information Act to all 217 authorities with responsibility for children's social care in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. Questions were framed to discover the following for each local authority for the period September 2014 to September 2015:

- Numbers of children suspected or identified as trafficked, unaccompanied children and separated children in care
- Numbers of each cohort who had gone missing
- Length and number of missing episodes per child
- Numbers of those children 'still missing' (including those who had reached the age of 18 within the specified time period, without being found)
- A breakdown of trafficked, separated and unaccompanied children by gender and nationality (Further breakdowns of data e.g. age at time of missing incident, were not sought due to concerns about the local authority cost limits for complying with FOI requests)

2. Youth Workshops

As part of our research we were keen to ensure that the views of children who have experienced trafficking were incorporated and helped shape the recommendations in this report.

Workshops were led by ECPAT UK's Head of Youth Participation, with regular attendees of a peer support group for trafficked girls and boys aged between 16 and 23 at the time. There were two workshops with a total of nine attendees, seven girls and two boys, who had agreed to take part. The workshops

adhered to ECPAT UK's code of ethics for consulting young people. The first part of the workshops was a focus group around key questions which explored reasons a young person may go missing from care.

The second part consisted of a ranking exercise where young people were given slips of paper, each with a measure aimed at preventing children going missing from care. The young participants worked in pairs to separate the measures into those they felt would and would not be effective. They were then asked to rank those they thought were good ideas, and a discussion followed on those measures which ranked highest and lowest, and the reasons they had been selected by the participants.

Feedback from the young people consulted in the workshops has fed into the broader research project, and will be referenced throughout the report; however, all contributions have been anonymised. The workshop participants were from a range of backgrounds and nationalities. Their contributions do not represent the views of a particular identity group, but are all responses from children who have been trafficked and who have experienced the UK care system.

3. Roundtable

An evidence-gathering roundtable with practitioners (representatives from regional police forces, local authority social workers, lawyers, accommodation providers, NGOs, policymakers, National Crime Agency, CEOP and OFSTED) and more to understand the challenges facing those working with children who may have been trafficked and unaccompanied children.

4. Survey

The research team conducted a large scale survey of professionals throughout the UK working with (or who might encounter) trafficked and unaccompanied or separated children. The survey sought views and feedback on the different situations, practices and prevention measures pertaining to children identified or suspected as trafficked going missing from care. The questionnaire included questions about the circumstances and challenges faced by statutory services and other care providers. The survey aimed to gain insight into respondents' understanding of the links between trafficking and going missing from care, and about a raft of possible ways of preventing missing episodes.

The survey attracted 288 responses from those working in agencies and services within a range of sectors, which included local authority, criminal justice, immigration services, health, education, NGO, legal services and community/faith groups.

The chapters of the report are framed by questions from the point of view of a young person. They are organised into the following thematic chapters:

- The number of trafficked and unaccompanied children going missing
- The links between child trafficking, unaccompanied children and going missing
- How should professionals respond to the risk of children going missing?

The report concludes with key recommendations for different stakeholders, informed by the research findings.



**"Does anyone realise
how many of us are
affected?"**

2The number of
trafficked and
unaccompanied
children going
missing

“ When I first came to this country, I needed somewhere safe, like a home. ”

– Member of ECPAT UK youth group
for young victims of trafficking

2.1 Existing data

Child trafficking

ECPAT UK is concerned that hundreds of trafficked children each year are not formally identified as trafficking victims. Estimates of the numbers of victims vary significantly from the number of officially recorded victims.

In 2014-15, 2,284 adults and 982 child victims of trafficking were recorded using the NRM, the UK framework for identifying victims of human trafficking and modern slavery⁶⁴ through which all children suspected of being trafficked should be referred. Government estimates, however, suggest that there are 13,000 victims of modern slavery in the UK, of whom a quarter (more than 3,000) are believed to be children.⁶⁵ This indicates that the NRM is underused by professionals. Indeed, a 2014 Home Office review of the NRM criticised low awareness of human trafficking and the NRM process.⁶⁶

Use of the NRM is vital to ensure that victims have access to appropriate protection and support. The NRM is also the main way in which national-level evidence is collected about patterns of child trafficking, which, in turn, informs policy and police investigations. The NRM does not, however, provide a local or regional breakdown of data.

The Anti-Trafficking Monitoring Group (ATMG), a coalition of 11 NGOs that monitors the UK's response to human trafficking, has previously highlighted the large disparity between positive decisions, dependent on whether the victim is a British or EU child or third country national child. Its findings have raised concerns about the inequality of treatment across nationalities in determining trafficking status and, therefore, the integrity of the data collected via the NRM.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ National Crime Agency. (2016). *End of Year Summary 2015*. Available at: <http://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/publications/676-national-referral-mechanism-statistics-end-of-year-summary-2015/file>

⁶⁵ Home Office. (2014). *Modern Slavery Strategy*. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/383764/Modern_Slavery_Strategy_FINAL_DEC2015.pdf

⁶⁶ Home Office. (2014). *Review of the National Referral Mechanism for Victims of Human Trafficking*. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/467434/Review_of_the_National_Referral_Mechanism_for_victims_of_human_trafficking.pdf

⁶⁷ The Anti-Trafficking Monitoring Group. (2013). *Hidden in Plain Sight: Three years on: updated analysis of UK measures to protect trafficked persons*. Available at: http://www.ecpat.org.uk/sites/default/files/atmg_hidden_in_plain_sight.pdf

Children missing from care

Existing data on missing children shows a complex picture. In a 2013 report, Ofsted highlighted some of the problems by stating that:



*There is little or no reliable data on missing children, including numbers, characteristics and trends. In most areas and at a national level, the data on incidence reported by local authorities and that reported by the police are very significantly different.*⁶⁸

In October 2015, the Department for Education (DfE) published a *Statistical First Release (SFR)* providing information about children in care in England, based on local authority end of year returns. This *SFR* contained newly collected information about children who were missing from care or away from placement without authorisation for the first time. Of the 99,230 children in care in England during the year ending 31 March 2015, 6,110 (6%) were recorded as missing at least once from their placement. The number of children who were away from their placement without authorisation was 3,230 (3%). There were 28,570 missing episodes recorded for the 6,110 children.⁶⁹

Equivalent data from police forces is collated by the National Crime Agency's Missing Persons Bureau, which relies on data returns from police forces. The Bureau, in its data report for the financial year 2015-16, published data about children missing from care across in England and Wales. These 32 forces had recorded 44,189 incidents of children missing from care (excluding 'absent' incidents), involving 9,367 individual children. Children missing from care made up at least 29% of all missing child incidents.⁷⁰

There are reasons to continue to treat data on missing children with caution. Police data on missing incidents is likely to reflect a lower number of missing incidents than the actual number of incidents for several reasons. Firstly, children who run away are not always reported missing to the police, particularly for relatively short incidents. Secondly, some missing person's cases may be recorded on police command and control systems under other incident types, such as 'concern for safety' and not subsequently re-categorised as missing incidents.⁷¹ Finally, national data capture relies on police

⁶⁸ Ofsted. (2013). *Missing children*. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/419144/Missing_children.pdf

⁶⁹ Department for Education. (2015). *Statistical First Release (SFR)*.

⁷⁰ National Crime Agency UK Missing Persons Bureau. (2016). *Missing Persons Data Report 2014/2015*. Available at: <http://www.missingpersons.police.uk/en/resources/missing-persons-data-report-2014-15>

⁷¹ National Crime Agency UK Missing Persons Bureau. (2013). *Missing Persons Data and Analysis 2011/12*. Available at: <http://www.missingpersons.police.uk/en/resources/missing-persons-data-and-analysis-2010-2011>

forces submitting data to the NCA's Missing Persons Bureau, and not all forces consistently comply. It is also a concern that not all police forces use systems that are able to assign a warning flag to cases highlighting, for example, that a missing child is known to be at risk of trafficking or sexual exploitation.

In 2012, a joint Inquiry by the APPG for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults and the APPG for Looked-After Children and Care Leavers recommended that a comprehensive and independent national system of data collection on trafficked children who go missing should be adopted.⁷² This recommendation is yet to be implemented, and a planned national missing person's database has not yet been established.

Data recording responsibilities

Specific obligations exist in the UK for statutory agencies to monitor risk and to support trafficked children. A 2014 amendment to the Care Planning and Care Leavers regulations required a child's care plan to record *"whether the child is a victim, or there is reason to believe they may be a victim, of trafficking in human beings or is an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child and has applied or intends to apply for asylum"*⁷³.

Department for Education (DfE) *Statutory guidance for local authorities on the care of unaccompanied asylum seeking and trafficked children* (2014) stipulates that the plan should include a description of how the child's needs in relation to being unaccompanied or trafficked will be met⁷⁴:

*In particular any issues relating to the vulnerability of the child to sexual exploitation, trafficking or criminal or gang involvement should be identified, with the care plan clearly setting out actions to address these needs and ensure the child is kept safe.*⁷⁵

⁷² All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults and the APPG for Looked-After Children and Care Leavers. (2012). *Report from the joint inquiry into children who go missing from care*. Available at: https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/tcs/u32/joint_appg_inquiry_-_report...pdf

⁷³ The Care Planning and Care Leavers (Amendment) Regulations. (2014).

⁷⁴ Department for Education. (2014). *Care of unaccompanied and trafficked children: Statutory guidance for local authorities on the care of unaccompanied asylum seeking and trafficked children*. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/330787/Care_of_unaccompanied_and_trafficked_children.pdf

⁷⁵ Ibid

Practice guidance on *Safeguarding children who may have been trafficked* states:

“

*Local Safeguarding Children Boards should also identify trafficking coordinators who can ensure a coordinated campaign of information-sharing to support the safeguarding agenda between local authorities, police and the NRM Competent Authorities to ensure a full picture is provided on child NRM referrals and secure the best safeguarding outcome for the child.*⁷⁶

Similarly, the *Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care* sets out a requirement for:

“

*A named senior manager within local authority children's service departments responsible for taking the lead on monitoring policies and performance relating to children and young people who go missing from home or care.*⁷⁷

2.2 What does our local authority data tell us?

Data challenges

The data should be viewed in the context of known challenges around the identification of victims, lack of awareness among and training of frontline workers, and lack of uniform recording practices by local authorities. It is highly probable that the number of trafficked and unaccompanied children going missing is higher than the data suggests. We believe, therefore, that the information provides only an indicative picture due to the limitations of local authority data recording.

⁷⁶ Department for Education. (2011). *Safeguarding children who may have been trafficked*. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/177033/DFE-00084-2011.pdf

⁷⁷ Department for Education. (2013). *Statutory guidance on children who runaway or go missing from home or care*. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/307867/Statutory_Guidance_-_Missing_from_care__3_.pdf

⁷⁸ Freedom of Information Act. (2000).

Those councils who could not provide information on trafficking cited an exemption set out in Section 12 of the Freedom of Information Act, which states that a Public Authority is not obliged to respond to a request for information where it estimates that the cost of doing so would “*exceed the appropriate limit*”⁷⁸. The majority of local councils who declined to respond claimed that gathering the information would breach this “*appropriate limit*”. The most common reason local authorities gave for declining to respond was not having a searchable data field for trafficking on case management systems

“We have no means of centrally extracting this information, and it would require a manual search of all our case records to locate, extract and collate this information, which, as I hope you can appreciate, would take a significant amount of officer time.”
– Local authority

“All local authorities are required statutorily to record risk factors in relation to children who are deemed to be at risk of harm through trafficking. (Anonymised council) does gather the data at the point of assessment and this identifies those young children at risk of trafficking. However, our reporting mechanisms do not pull together all of the data you require in an electronic format that would provide this overview.”
– Local authority

Some responses from local authorities demonstrated a lack of understanding around key processes and obligations, such as the requirement for all children where trafficking is a concern to be referred to the NRM. Despite the requirement on local authorities to make a notification to the NRM for any child suspected to be a victim of slavery or trafficking,⁷⁹ our research identified worrying inconsistencies:

“12 young people have been identified as being trafficked, and 6 have been referred to the National Referral Mechanism.”
– Local authority

Another authority did not consider that information on trafficking needed to be held by the local authority:

“In accordance with the Council’s duty to provide appropriate advice and assistance under the Freedom of Information Act, the Executive Director for Social Care advises that requests about trafficking should be made to the Police.”
– Local authority

⁷⁹ On 1st November 2015, the Duty to Notify requirement (from the Modern Slavery Act England & Wales 2015) on public authorities to notify the Secretary of State of any child encountered in England and Wales who is a suspected victim of slavery or trafficking came into effect. For children, the mechanism for this is the NRM. Home Office. (2016). *Duty to Notify the Home Office of Potential Victims of Modern Slavery: Guidance for Specified Public Authorities*. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/508817/Duty_to_Notify_Guidance_Version_2.0_.pdf

Numbers of trafficked and unaccompanied children in care

According to official statistics, in the year ending June 2015, there were **3,253** asylum applications from unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. In 2015, NCA data shows that **982** potential child victims of trafficking were referred into the NRM.

Figure 1

Children identified/suspected as trafficked and unaccompanied children, Sept 2014-15

590

Children identified/suspected as trafficked

4,744

Unaccompanied children

The charts and figures below show data collected for the *Heading back to harm* study:

Figure 2

Children identified/suspected as trafficked, Sept 2014-15

217

local authorities were asked for information

174 (80%) provided information

68 (40%) had one or more children identified/suspected as trafficked

54

(79%) had more than one child identified/suspected as trafficked

58

Largest number of children identified/suspected as trafficked in a single authority

Figure 3

Unaccompanied children, Sept 2014-15

217

local authorities were asked for information

194 (89%) provided information

130 (67%) had one or more unaccompanied children

114

(88%) had more than one unaccompanied child

985

Largest number of unaccompanied children in a single authority

Figure 4

Map showing regional breakdown of numbers of children identified/suspected as trafficked and numbers of unaccompanied children

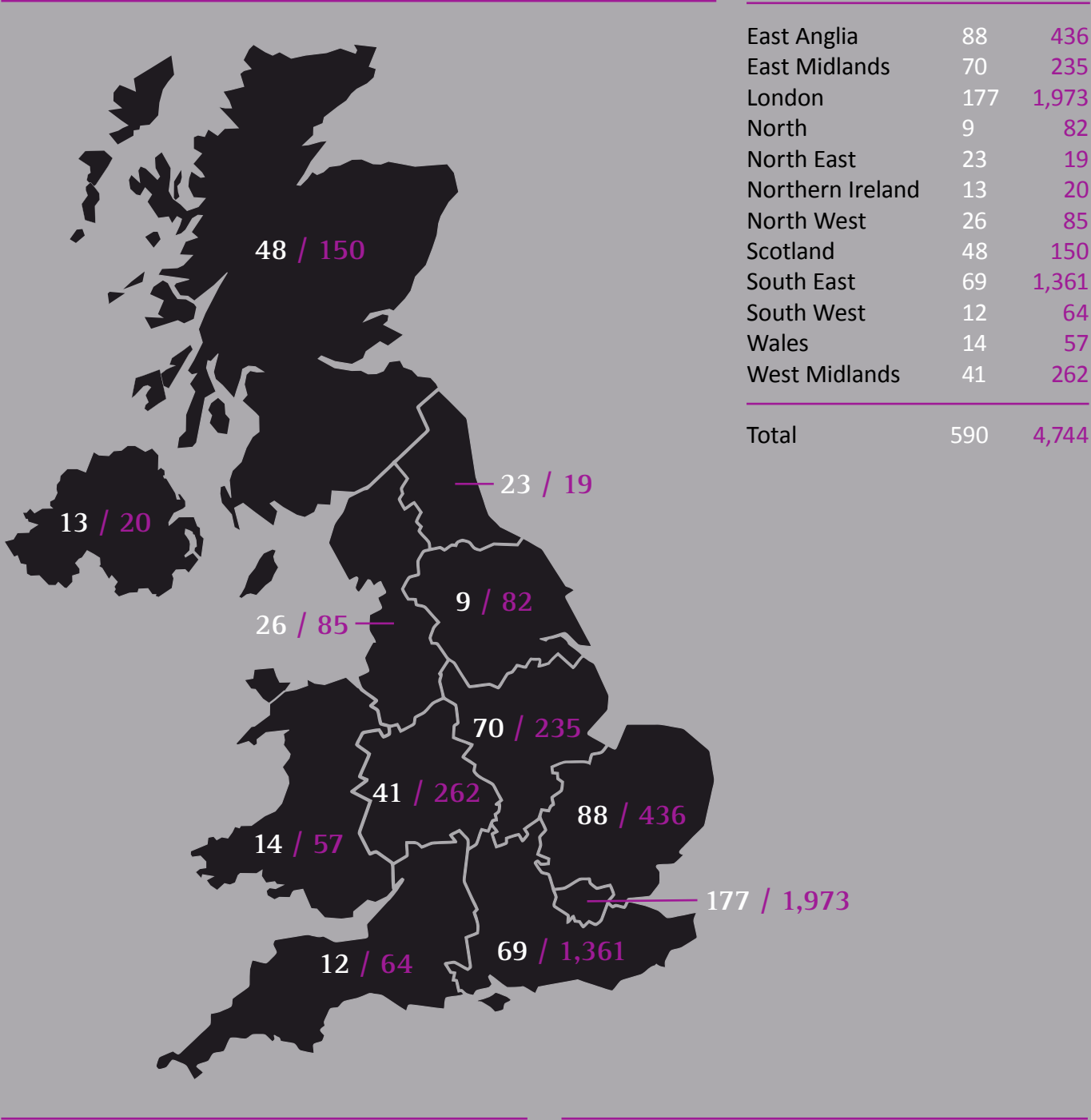


Figure 4 shows the regions recording the majority of children suspected or identified as trafficked in local authority care. London, the South East, East Anglia, and the East and West Midlands accounted for **75% or 445 children**. These regions were also most likely to have unaccompanied children with **90% or 4,267 children**.

Lower numbers of trafficked and unaccompanied children were recorded in other parts of the UK. Local authorities in Wales reported 14 trafficked and 57 unaccompanied children, and authorities in Northern Ireland reported 13 trafficked and 20 unaccompanied children.

Data from Scotland recorded 150 unaccompanied children and 48 trafficked children in the care of Scottish local authorities for the relevant time period. Other estimates of child trafficking victims within Scotland can be taken from the government-funded Scottish Guardianship Service (SGS), which works with victims of trafficking, which revealed that 40% of the 262 unaccompanied children it has registered since 2011 were brought to Scotland by traffickers.⁸²

Traditionally, areas where there are ports of entry into the UK have experienced the highest number of separated children in local authority care. An uneven distribution of unaccompanied children in the care system is an issue the government seeks to address through the National UASC Transfer Protocol. Local authorities who currently

experience lower numbers of unaccompanied children in their care may start to have more as a result of this dispersal. It is, therefore, a concern that, as vulnerable children are moved throughout the country, local councils develop expertise and processes that respond to their needs and address risks, including going missing and re-trafficking.

The responses from local authorities in London show considerable variance between neighbouring boroughs. London is considered a key destination for human traffickers, where some of the highest numbers of victims are currently recorded. However, **nearly a third** (10 of 33) of London authorities reported no trafficked children, as shown in **Figure 5**, prompting concerns about low awareness, a lack of training and possible poor recording practices in these areas.



Figure 5
Map showing number of children identified/suspected as trafficked in London boroughs

⁸² BBC News. (23 September 2016). “Threefold rise in child trafficking into Scotland”. Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-37431518>

*Information not provided denotes a local authority that has been unable to supply data because complying with the request would exceed the “appropriate limit” or they have concerns about identification due to a dataset of <10.

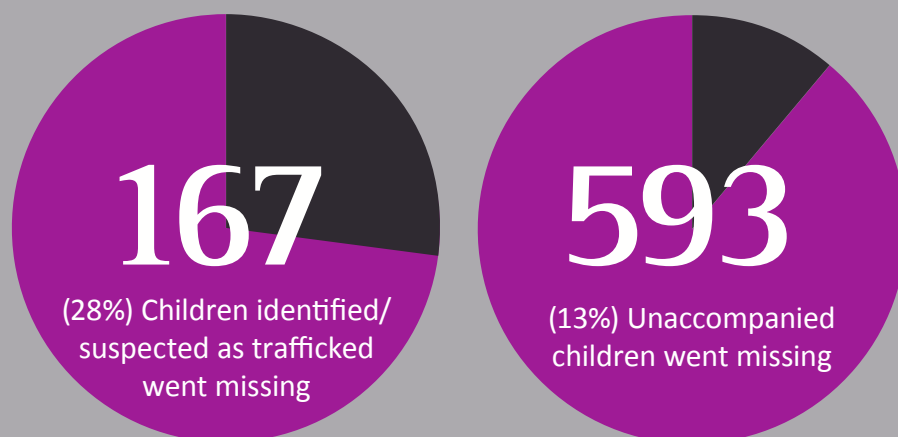
Trafficked and unaccompanied children missing from care

We asked local authorities to reveal how many trafficked and unaccompanied children had gone missing and were 'still missing' at the end of the data collection period for this study. Forty-five local authorities responded and revealed a total of **207 children identified/suspected of being trafficked or unaccompanied children had gone missing and remained unaccounted for**. The largest number in a specific local authority was 53, and five was the mean average number of 'still missing' children for the 45 local authority areas that reported on this.

During the period September 2014 to September 2015, five of the 23 children/young people who entered the care of the authority having been identified as being unaccompanied (UASC), all of which were also suspected as having been trafficked were never found. None of these cases remain open to Social Care.

– Local authority

Chart showing children identified/suspected as trafficked and unaccompanied children who went missing, Sept 2014-2015



As shown above, **28% (167)** of the 590 children suspected or identified as trafficked in this research were recorded as missing on at least one occasion. These 167 children were spread over 39 local authority areas across the UK. The highest number of trafficked children reported as missing from one authority was 22, and the mean average number of children going missing (across the 39 authorities who reported missing children) was four.

Of the **4,744 unaccompanied children**, **13% (593)** went missing at least once, from 74 local authorities. One authority reported **190 (20%)** of their **985 unaccompanied children** having gone missing.

We did not find, in our data from local authorities, any relationship between the number of trafficked or unaccompanied children accommodated and the proportion who went missing. **Figures 6 and 7** below show the local authorities with more than

20 trafficked and more than 100 unaccompanied children, along with the rates of missing incidents in those areas. Amongst these local authorities, the rates of missing incidents are noticeably higher rates of missing incidents amongst trafficked than unaccompanied children.

Figure 6

Table showing local authorities with more than 20 children identified/suspected as trafficked and rates of missing incidents

Local authority	Number of children identified/suspected as trafficked	Proportion of children identified/suspected as trafficked who went missing
Thurrock	58	19%
Hillingdon	37	60%
Croydon	31	20%
Kent County Council	31	68%

Figure 7

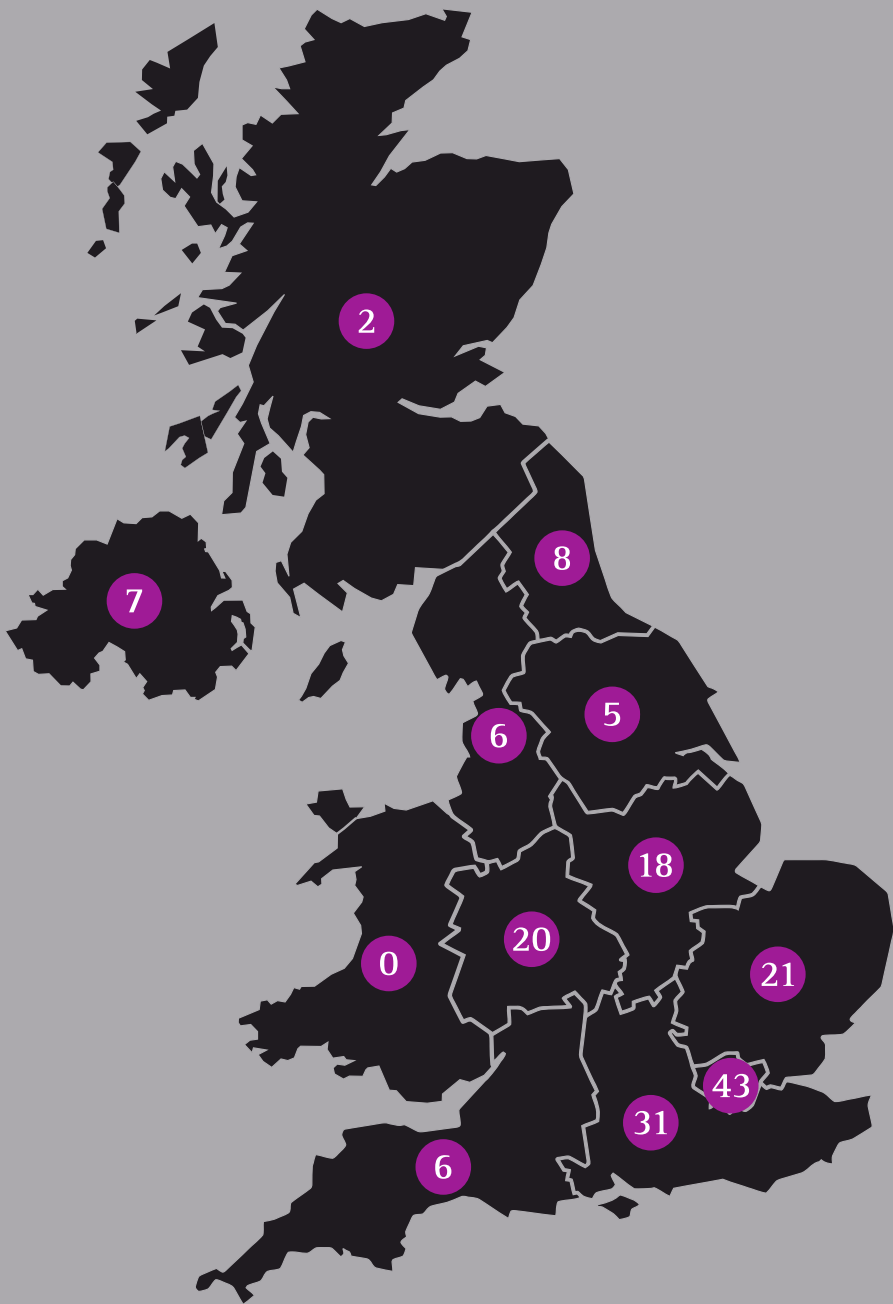
Table showing local authorities with more than 100 unaccompanied children and rates of missing incidents

Local authority	Number of unaccompanied children	Proportion of unaccompanied children who went missing
Kent County Council	985	20%
Croydon	605	14%
Hillingdon	216	9%
Surrey	129	25%

Figures 8 and 9 show a regional breakdown of the numbers and percentages of children identified or suspected of having been trafficked and unaccompanied children who have gone missing. For both groups of children, London and the

South East were the regions where most children had gone missing. In the case of child victims of trafficking, there were also comparatively high numbers going missing in East Anglia and in the Midlands.

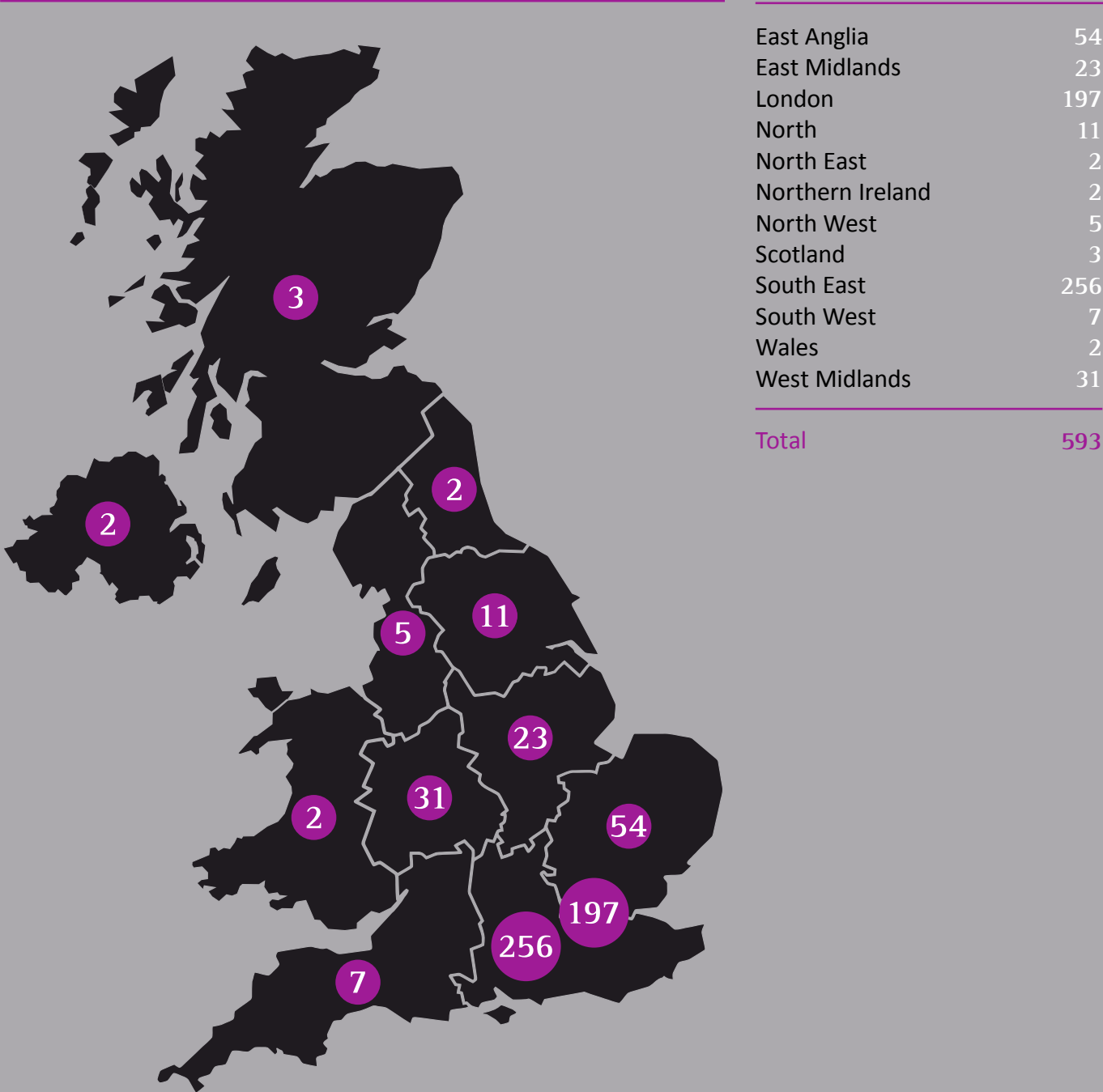
Figure 8
Map showing children identified/suspected as trafficked who went missing or ‘absent’: Regional breakdown, including Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland



Numbers of children identified/suspected as trafficked who went missing	
East Anglia	21
East Midlands	18
London	43
North	5
North East	8
Northern Ireland	7
North West	6
Scotland	2
South East	31
South West	6
Wales	0
West Midlands	20
Total	167

Figure 9

Map showing unaccompanied children who went missing or ‘absent’:
Regional breakdown, including Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland



Local authorities in Wales and Scotland reported low numbers of missing trafficked or unaccompanied children. Despite relatively high numbers of unaccompanied children in care, Scotland’s figures appear favourable. Information was requested from Glasgow City Council on why it seemed to have fewer cases of missing migrant children. While there were no definitive answers, the existing system of guardianship for separated and trafficked migrant children and the use of vulnerable young person’s procedures⁸³ are noted differences to current practices in other parts of the UK.

⁸³ See good practice example 2, page 86

Missing episodes

The FOI returns for *Heading back to harm* revealed 331 missing incidents recorded for the 167 children who had been identified as or suspected of being trafficked, and 994 incidents for the 593 unaccompanied children. Both equate to a rate of approximately **2.4 incidents per child**.

In 2015-16, the NCA Missing Persons Bureau reported that UK police forces recorded 181,954 missing and 'absent' incidents relating to at least 67,471 individual children.⁸⁴ The police data suggests that nearly a third (62%) of missing children episodes are attributable to repeat incidents.⁸⁵ The NCA Missing Persons Bureau also provided information about the reasons for missing incidents by age group. The data available from the 22 police forces using the COMPACT database shows that those forces recorded 390 incidents of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children going missing, 191 incidents of trafficked children going missing and 1,213 incidents of 'unaccompanied juveniles' going missing.⁸⁶

Risk and vulnerability

Missing episodes can be indicators of trafficking and other vulnerabilities, including sexual exploitation. The National Crime Agency's CEOP Command highlighted the link with sexually exploited children and going missing repeatedly for varying periods of time in its 2011 report, *Out of Sight, Out of Mind*.⁸⁷ More recently, a 2012 Inquiry by the Office of the Children's Commissioner highlighted the fact that going missing from home

or care is "generally seen in children who are already being sexually exploited", and that this is well understood by professionals.⁸⁸ Indeed, many police forces employ a coordinator with joint responsibility for missing incidents and child sexual exploitation.⁸⁹

Repeated missing incidents, both very short and longer disappearances, are recognised to be key indicators that a child may be experiencing, or being groomed for, sexual exploitation.⁹⁰ In a number of cases, victims are internally trafficked within the UK by being taken to other towns for the express purpose of being 'given' or 'sold' for sexual exploitation.⁹¹

Statutory guidance on children who go missing states: "When analysing trends and patterns in relation to children in care who run away particular attention should be paid to repeat 'missing' and 'absent' episodes."⁹² It advises: "Authorities need to be alert to the risk of sexual exploitation or involvement in drugs, gangs or criminal activity, trafficking and aware of local 'hot spots' as well as concerns about any individuals to whom children runaway to be with."⁹³

However, one local authority told us: "We do abide by the guidance for missing children routinely reporting to Police, however, we do not record separately whether or not they are considered to be trafficked." Another stated that: "We do have some missing stats of children missing from our care, and comply with the reporting requirement on these, but they are not broken down as children suspected of being trafficked."

⁸⁴ National Crime Agency Missing Persons Bureau. (2016). *Missing Persons Data Report 2015-16*. Available at: <http://missingpersons.police.uk/en/resources/missing-persons-data-report-2015-16>

⁸⁵ Ibid

⁸⁶ Ibid

⁸⁷ Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre. (2011). *Out of Sight, Out of Mind*. Available at: https://www.ceop.police.uk/Documents/ceopdocs/ceop_thematic_assessment_executive_summary.pdf

⁸⁸ Office of the Children's Commissioner. (2013). "If only someone had listened": Office of the Children's Commissioner's Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups: Final Report. Available at: <http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/publications/if-only-someone-had-listened-inquiry-child-sexual-exploitation-gangs-and-groups>

⁸⁹ Ibid

⁹⁰ Ibid

⁹¹ House of Commons Home Affairs Committee. (2013). *Child sexual exploitation and the response to localised grooming: Second Report of Session 2013-14, Volume 1*.

⁹² Department for Education. (2013). *Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care*. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/307867/Statutory_Guidance_-_Missing_from_care__3_.pdf

⁹³ Ibid

A report by the House of Commons Home Affairs Committee on child sexual exploitation and the response to localised grooming, describes a model of child sexual exploitation in which a group of abusers target vulnerable children, including, but not confined to, those who are looked after by a local authority.⁹⁴

Duration of missing incidents

Our findings suggest that trafficked and unaccompanied children are more likely to go missing for a longer period than other missing children. National statistics for missing show that almost two-thirds of missing incidents last less than one day. Although there are some difficulties in comparing the figures from the FOI requests to local authorities with the national figures, because

many authorities did not return information on the duration of incidents, the data we have suggests that for both trafficked and unaccompanied children **around a third are missing for more than a week**. This compares with the 2% found in national statistics.⁹⁵

The results of the data request to local authorities are mixed in terms of what they show about the scale of trafficked and unaccompanied children going missing. The process of data collection, however, demonstrated that many local authorities are still unable to monitor patterns or report on their local circumstances. This inability to report figures limits the scope for comparison, for identification of change over time, and for planning and putting in place adequate resources.

Figure 10

Table showing missing incidents for children identified/suspected as trafficked and duration

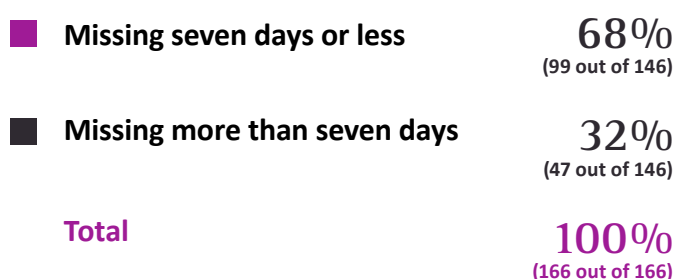
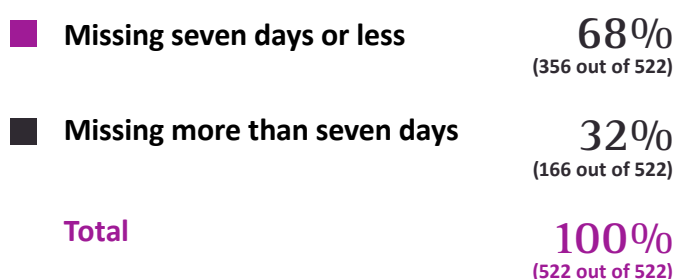


Figure 11

Table showing missing incidents for unaccompanied children and duration



⁹⁴ House of Commons Home Affairs Committee. (2013). *Child sexual exploitation and the response to localised grooming: Second Report of Session 2013–14, Volume 1*.

⁹⁵ National Crime Agency Missing Persons Bureau. (2016). *Missing Persons Data Report 2015–16*. Available at: <http://missingpersons.police.uk/en/resources/missing-persons-data-report-2015-16>



Some local authorities acknowledged shortcomings in the way they had recorded concerns for trafficked children and, as a direct result of our research, have committed to steps that will improve their recording systems and make reporting on the issue possible:

“The Council can advise that we have recently introduced a question about trafficking in the Children and Families assessment. Once this recording process is embedded this information should be more accessible.”

– Local authority

“At present, our child in need codes do not contain a code for children who have been trafficked, these are classified currently under the generic category of abuse or neglect. We have recognised that our codes need to be more specific and this matter is in hand for new codes to be re-launched by end of Feb 2016.”

– Local authority

“The Council is now to alter the way in which information concerning trafficked children is recorded. This information will now be held centrally and work on this project is already underway.”

– Local authority

“The new social care recording system to be implemented in October (2016), will allow for this assessment factor trafficked to be recorded in a way on the child’s record which will enable electronic reporting.”

– Local authority

There was also reason for optimism, as some local authorities demonstrated a stronger understanding of the safeguarding context of trafficking concerns, and had processes and staff members in place with oversight of linked issues such as trafficking, CSE and missing:

“

For information, data for missing children is collected and evidenced and reported through the Missing and CSE sub group of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB). There is a named Senior Manager responsible for leading on Children Missing from Home or Care, and in June 2016, the Action Plan on behalf of the LSCB was updated in relation to this work. Work is progressing to strengthen and align the work of the Community Safety Partnership and Safeguarding Services, and there is a named trafficking coordinator for the Authority.

In conclusion, there is massive inconsistency in the way in which data is collected and recorded across local authorities in the UK. This makes it very difficult to assess the national scale in terms of the number of children who are in care and are unaccompanied and who may also be trafficked or at risk of trafficking. It raises serious concerns about how, at a local and national level, government is able to scope and strategically respond to child trafficking. The number of children going missing from care is significant, particularly those who have been trafficked. The reasons for this are explained in the following chapter.



**"What is happening
to us?"**

3The links between child trafficking, unaccompanied children and going missing

This chapter explores the characteristics of trafficked and unaccompanied children who go missing from care. It also examines some of the 'push and pull' reasons why children go missing and the potential risks children may face when they are missing from care.

“These are children that are trafficked, and they are very vulnerable to further exploitation, whatever their nationality and ethnicity.”

– Health professional

3.1 Nationality and gender

Only 10 local authorities were able to provide detailed information about the nationality or gender of children identified or suspected of having been trafficked who had gone missing (see Figure 12). From those that did, the highest recorded numbers were from Vietnam, with 12 children who were all male, and the second group were British, with 10 children, the majority of whom were female.

The latest NRM data shows that a greater number of boys have been identified as exploited, mainly in labour exploitation, which also encompasses those trafficked for criminal purposes.⁹⁶

For unaccompanied asylum-seeking children who had gone missing, the data revealed that boys were considerably more likely to go missing than girls. In terms of nationality, Albanian, Afghan, Vietnamese and Eritrean unaccompanied children had appreciable rates of going missing (see Figure 13).

⁹⁶ National Crime Agency. (2016). *National Referral Mechanism – End of Year Summary 2015*. Available at: <http://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/publications/676-national-referral-mechanism-statistics-end-of-year-summary-2015/file>

Figure 12

Table showing children identified/suspected as trafficked who went missing by nationality and gender

Nationality	Male	Female	Total	
Vietnamese	12	0	12	22%
British	1	9	10	19%
Albanian	1	1	2	4%
Egyptian	1	0	1	2%
Eritrean	1	0	1	2%
Hungarian	0	1	1	2%
Non-EU	0	1	1	2%
Polish	1	0	1	2%
Turkish	1	0	1	2%
Zimbabwean	0	1	1	2%
No further information given	8	15	23	43%
Total	26	28	54	Column does not equal 100% due to rounding

Figure 13

Table showing unaccompanied children who went missing by nationality and gender

Nationality	Male	Female	Total	
Albanian	82	2	84	22%
Afghan	71	1	72	19%
Vietnamese	36	9	45	12%
Eritrean	38	3	41	11%
Syrian	26	1	27	7%
Egyptian	25	0	25	6%
Non-EU	10	4	14	4%
Turkish	6	1	7	2%
Iraq	6	0	6	2%
Iranian	4	2	6	2%
African	4	1	5	1%
Sudanese	5	0	5	1%
Algerian	4	0	4	1%
Kuwati	3	1	4	1%
Moroccan	4	0	4	1%
Pakistani	2	1	3	1%
Ethiopian	2	0	2	1%
Chinese	1	0	1	0%
European	1	0	1	0%
Indian	1	0	1	0%
Lebanese	1	0	1	0%
Middle Eastern	1	0	1	0%
No further information given	26	2	28	8%
Total	359	28	387	Column does not equal 100% due to rounding

This failure to collect and report such data has been noted previously; the APPG *Inquiry into missing children* found that of 64 local authorities responding to the inquiry, only two collected centralised data on whether children had been trafficked, with only five collecting the nationality of children in care who go missing.⁹⁷

Despite the low level of data provided on nationality in the local authority data submissions for *Heading back to harm*, responses from the survey of professionals indicated that almost 60% of respondents thought a trafficked child's nationality had a bearing on whether a child was likely to go missing. For unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, this dropped to 45% of respondents believing that nationality had an impact.

Professionals responding to the survey identified increased vulnerability amongst foreign national children, particularly those who do not speak English well or at all, those who lack identity documents, those whose asylum or immigration status is unclear and those who have links to traffickers. Ongoing links with traffickers was the reason most strongly perceived as a reason why trafficked or unaccompanied children go missing from care.

Respondents to our survey of professionals did not reach consensus on the issue of gender; some believed more girls went missing than boys, some that more boys went missing and some that the spread was even. It may be that there are stronger patterns in certain areas, or amongst particular nationalities, but these would need to be explored further on a local level to form a truer picture.

Children from Vietnam

Some survey respondents provided further insights about particular nationalities they had encountered. Amongst those that did, there were strong views that Vietnamese children were more likely to go missing than unaccompanied children of other nationalities. These views were informed by the perceived links with Vietnamese organised trafficking networks.

“Vietnamese children are very likely to go missing, many will re-appear months/years later and would have been re-trafficked in this time.

– NGO professional

⁹⁷ All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults and the APPG for Looked-After Children and Care Leavers. (2012). *Report from the joint inquiry into children who go missing from care*. Available at: https://www.childrensociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/tcs/u32/joint_appg_inquiry_-_report...pdf

“

Certain nationalities such as Vietnamese are most commonly linked to organised criminal gangs trafficking them in and (are) most at risk for absconding to later be encountered in cannabis cultivation or economic exploitation linked to nail bars.

– Immigration professional

The trend of trafficking of Vietnamese adults and children for forced labour or modern slavery in cannabis farms has been identified by a number of organisations previously, including by ECPAT UK in 2007.⁹⁸ The trafficking of Vietnamese children into the UK was categorised as the largest identified trend in the NCA's CEOP Command's 2010 *Strategic threat assessment of child trafficking in the UK*.⁹⁹ Traffickers were said to recruit victims from poorer rural provinces who believed they were being smuggled rather than trafficked. The children and their families were ensnared in debt bondage, borrowing from money lenders connected to the trafficking networks.¹⁰⁰ The UK was said to be a country where: *"Vietnamese criminal networks are prominent in the illegal cultivation and supply of cannabis. In the UK, the proceeds of these crimes are laundered through Vietnamese businesses such as nail bars."*¹⁰¹

Research in 2013 by the RACE in Europe project supported existing intelligence regarding this trafficking trend. Their FOI request to all police forces across the UK found that, since January 2011, 1,405 individuals had been arrested for offences relating to the cultivation of cannabis under Section 4(2) and Section 6(2) of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, and 63% of those arrested were Vietnamese – 13% of whom were children.¹⁰²

The 2014 National Crime Agency strategic assessment of human trafficking in the UK highlights cases of trafficking for a range of criminal activities including cannabis cultivation, with Vietnamese victims accounting for 72% of those exploited in this way.¹⁰³ Vietnam was recorded as the top country of origin for trafficked children in the UK in 2015, with 248 victims,¹⁰⁴ and data from the NRM consistently shows that Vietnam is the single largest source country for child victims of trafficking, with forced labour being the most commonly recorded form of exploitation for Vietnamese children.¹⁰⁵

The disproportionate numbers of Vietnamese children featuring on the UK Missing Kids website has also been highlighted by ECPAT

⁹⁸ ECPAT UK. (2007).

⁹⁹ Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre. (2010). *Strategic Threat Assessment: Child Trafficking in the UK*. Available at: https://www.ceop.police.uk/Documents/ceopdocs/Child_Trafficking_Strategic_Threat_Assessment_2010_NPM_Final.pdf

¹⁰⁰ Ibid

¹⁰¹ Ibid

¹⁰² RACE in Europe project. (2013). *Victim or Criminal? Trafficking for Forced Criminal Exploitation in Europe*. Available at: http://www.ecpat.org.uk/sites/default/files/race_report_english.pdf

¹⁰³ National Crime Agency. (2015). *NCA Strategic assessment: The Nature and Scale of Human Trafficking in 2014*. Available at: <http://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/publications/656-nca-strategic-assessment-the-nature-and-scale-of-human-trafficking-in-2014/file>

¹⁰⁴ National Crime Agency. (2016). *National Referral Mechanism – End of Year Summary 2015*. Available at: <http://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/publications/676-national-referral-mechanism-statistics-end-of-year-summary-2015/file>

¹⁰⁵ RACE in Europe project. (2013).

UK¹⁰⁶ and in media reports.¹⁰⁷ In 2010, 28 Vietnamese children went missing from Kent, with 60% going missing within three days of entering care and the only ones recovered discovered in situations of exploitation in cannabis factories.¹⁰⁸ As a consequence, the then Children's Commissioner for England recommended that *"all unaccompanied Vietnamese children should be regarded, prima facie, as having been trafficked"*¹⁰⁹.

Case study – Kim

Kim* is a Vietnamese girl who was trafficked to the UK, via Russia. The traffickers took Kim's identify documents when she left Vietnam. On arrival in England, she was arrested by the police, detained overnight in a police cell and then taken to an immigration removal centre as an illegal immigrant, where she was treated as an adult. Kim was only 15 at the time. She remained at the detention centre for more than two months. Whilst there, she told healthcare staff about her experiences in Russia and how scared she was of the people who brought her to the UK.

A lawyer visited Kim at the detention centre and secured her release after making an urgent application to court. Kim was released to the care of a local authority for a lawful age assessment to take place. She was placed with a foster family. Kim was extremely traumatised about her journey to the UK, having been exploited before coming to the UK. No statutory agency referred Kim to the National Referral Mechanism for trafficking to be considered. Instead, a referral was made by a specialist trafficking charity.

Her solicitors asked the local authority to accept her age or, in the alternative, for an age assessment to commence once she had been given some time to recover from her experiences. However, the local authority began Kim's age assessment only a few days after her release from detention. Uniformed police officers were also sent to her foster

placement to interview her, but there was no interpreter present (they were only available via telephone).

Kim was very scared and reluctant to talk about her experiences to the authorities. Within days of her police interview, the foster mother saw Kim leave the house and get into a car in the middle of the night. The foster mother was unable to chase her because she could not leave her other young children unattended. Police were given the number plate of the car but Kim has not been seen since and no arrests have been made in connection with her disappearance or trafficking.

Her foster mother had previously noticed that there was a mobile phone in Kim's belongings, but social workers were unaware she had this. It became clear afterwards that the traffickers had been contacting her and putting pressure on Kim to leave her placement.

The first stage of Kim's trafficking identification decision (her 'Reasonable Grounds' decision in the NRM) was not made within the recommended five days and has been 'stayed', i.e. suspended, because she went missing. Her age assessment was never completed and so it is still unclear if she is being treated as an adult or a child. It took several weeks for NGO workers and lawyers to convince the police to treat her as a missing person, and not an 'absconder'.

*not her real name

¹⁰⁶ Ibid

¹⁰⁷ BBC News (17 June 2013). "Why are so many of the UK's missing teenagers Vietnamese?" Available here: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-22903511>

¹⁰⁸ All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults and the APPG for Looked-After Children and Care Leavers. (2012). *Report from the joint inquiry into children who go missing from care*. Available at: https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/tcs/u32/joint_appg_inquiry_-_report...pdf

¹⁰⁹ Ibid

British children

British children are the third most prominent nationality recorded as trafficking victims in NRM data for 2015, with the overwhelming majority being girls who have been trafficked for sexual exploitation.¹¹⁰ Our research showed a similar pattern and, despite few local authorities providing sufficient detail, British children were the second largest national group of trafficked children reported missing from care.

A perception that white British girls were more vulnerable to going or staying missing was strongly evident in the survey of professionals, although 42% of the respondents stated that British children were, in their experience, 'rarely' or 'never' recorded as trafficked.

“

We have referred a number of (British) children to the NRM as a result of missing episodes and concerns regarding child sexual exploitation. As our knowledge and understanding develops, it is highly likely that more children will be viewed as trafficked or at risk of.

– Social worker

¹¹⁰ National Crime Agency. (2016). *National Referral Mechanism – End of Year Summary 2015*. Available at: <http://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/publications/676-national-referral-mechanism-statistics-end-of-year-summary-2015/file>



3.2 Factors related to risk of going missing

We asked both young people and respondents to our survey of professionals to tell us why trafficked and unaccompanied children go missing from care. They suggested the following reasons, in descending order:

Young people's views

- Control/influence of traffickers
- Lack of trust in adults who are there to keep you safe
- Lack of consistent support from a trusted individual, such as an independent advocate or guardian
- Lack of connection with foster carers
- Feeling isolated, like you don't belong
- Lack of engagement with school, social networks
- Fear of not being believed, and maybe being deported
- Uncertain immigration status
- Stressful procedures, such as age assessments and official interviews

Professionals' views

- Children not being identified as trafficked
- Control/influence of traffickers
- Unsuitable care placements
- Lack of consistent support from a trusted individual/specialist support (including independent advocacy)
- Poor protection measures
- Asylum and immigration concerns (highest rated reason for unaccompanied children)

Being under the control of traffickers

The young people who took part in workshops raised the influence of traffickers in causing a child to run away. They thought a child may feel they have to work to pay back money owed to the people who brought them to the UK. The groups of formerly trafficked young people mentioned that a child might go missing to escape the demands of traffickers, implying that they did not feel that authorities could safeguard them effectively in their placement.

Issues with care placements/support

Lack of confidentiality

Young people at the workshops expressed concerns about social workers and a lack of confidentiality. One young person described how she had spoken to her social worker about a problem with her foster carer. She explained that the social worker disclosed everything she had said to the foster carer, which made the situation worse and eventually led to the breakdown of the placement. The young people had all found it difficult to establish trust with their social workers.

“

Trusting someone is hard, it is the most important thing.

– Member of ECPAT UK youth group for young victims of trafficking

“

Young people need to feel listened to, if they tell their social worker they don't like their foster carer no-one cares.

– Member of ECPAT UK youth group for young victims of trafficking

Not understanding culture

Many young people at the workshops felt that foster carers lacked a cultural understanding of their background. This lack of understanding manifested itself in everyday interactions such as the preparation of meals, e.g. if a trafficked child did not like the food offered by the carer. The young people felt that this issue had often been dealt with insensitively by carers. In one instance, the child was not allowed to have items connected to their religion at home, as it was different from their foster carer's religion.

Feeling isolated/not belonging

Many of the young people at the workshops said they felt their social worker and foster carers were just “doing their job” and showed them limited warmth or compassion. Some discussed not feeling welcome and feeling intimidated and scared when they met their social worker.

“

She was always very cold and professional. I just wanted to her to ask: 'Are you OK?'

– Member of ECPAT UK youth group for young victims of trafficking

The young people explained that foster carers did not have the time to go to appointments with them and offer support with things they might find difficult, such as opening a bank account, or medical appointments. This made them feel isolated.



We have nothing to do, no college, social, anywhere to go.

– Member of ECPAT UK youth group for young victims of trafficking

Not being believed

Many of the young people at the research workshops felt that social workers or immigration workers often did not believe their accounts of exploitation or abuse, and this made it hard to trust them. They questioned how the Home Office would believe them, if the social worker did not believe them. This meant that they did not want to keep repeating information to their social worker – even though they were there to help – because they felt they were never going to be believed.



Social Services never believe a young person, they always think we are bad.

– Member of ECPAT UK youth group for young victims of trafficking

The young people also said they had been asked too many questions, and the same questions repeatedly by social workers and immigration officers. They found this upsetting, exhausting and could ultimately become a disincentive to telling the truth.



I will just give the answers they want to hear.

– Member of ECPAT UK youth group for young victims of trafficking

Lack of control

The young people who took part in workshops felt that they had no control over their situation. One described finding it very uncomfortable that their foster carer kept all their money. One group member recounted being given just £10 per week by her foster carer for food and personal items, which made her feel angry. She said that this made her want to look for other ways to find money, which could put her at risk.

The young people felt they did not have any choice in what happened to them. They had to just do what they were told, and they did not know what was going to happen, which they found deeply unsettling.

Fear of age assessment

One young person's age assessment had taken several years to resolve, and she found the process very stressful. Because it was impossible for her family to provide a birth certificate, she had to visit a dentist to have her teeth examined, in order to assess her age. Another young person had spent two years sharing a room in accommodation designed for adults due to an age assessment based on the age in her passport; she was later found to be a child. This young woman reflected that this situation could lead to a young person going missing.

One young person described the support she received from a charity worker during the age assessment process:

“

I feel happy when I speak to her, more than social services, I would have liked her involved from the beginning.

– Member of ECPAT UK youth group for young victims of trafficking

Asylum/immigration concerns

The young people's group thought a key reason a child might go missing was the uncertainty about immigration status. The young people described the immigration processes they had experienced as making them feel: *“We are nothing in this country.”* They found talking to immigration workers an extremely scary experience, and they were worried that they would be deported. They talked about incredibly slow processes for decisions and multiple interviews by different professionals.

“

Young people apply for asylum in this country and wait for so long it makes them disappointed. They do not feel happy, they may run away.

– Member of ECPAT UK youth group for young victims of trafficking

3.3 Identification and age assessment

Identification as a child who may have been trafficked

Not being identified as a potential victim of trafficking was found to be a key risk to a child going missing from care. Data on child victims of trafficking is collected nationally through the NRM. This is not broken down into local or regional data (although it is possible to see who made the referral, i.e. which police force, local authority or NGO). Therefore, it is difficult to compare the NRM data with the local authority data collected in *Heading back to harm*.

It emerged during the research that a child not believed when he/she disclosed trafficking, or trafficking indicators being missed by professionals, could compound the risk of going missing. Practitioners frequently reported that potentially trafficked children who had gone missing had not been referred to the NRM, despite statutory guidance stating:

“In cases where a child displays indicators that they may have been trafficked, whether from overseas or within the UK, social workers or other front line professionals should refer the case to the relevant competent authority by sending the child NRM referral form to the UK Human Trafficking Centre.”

Practitioners also raised concerns about NRM decisions being ‘stayed’, i.e. suspended, if a child went missing during the NRM process.

The 2014 Home Office review of the NRM resulted in very few recommendations specifically around children who may have been trafficked. After the NRM’s first year of operation, the Anti-Trafficking Monitoring Group (ATMG) published a report that criticised the lack of sufficient expertise in relation to children of those tasked with identifying child victims.¹¹¹ Further, the decision to ‘bypass’ the existing strong and mature child protection system and locate the children’s NRM outside of this system, the report argued, had a detrimental effect on trafficked children. It also asserted that children were not mini-adults, and putting children and young people through such a system was inappropriate.

¹¹¹ The Anti-Trafficking Monitoring Group. (2012). *Wrong Kind of Victim?* Available at: http://www.ecpat.org.uk/sites/default/files/wrong_kind_of_victim_full_report.pdf

The NRM for children currently operates using the same framework as for adults. The only notable differences are that a child does not have to consent to be referred, and a decision about identification applies the definition of child trafficking, not adult trafficking, making it a simpler definition.

Since then, the ATMG has produced research examining the NRM in practice for children.¹¹² It found evidence of poor decision making, a worrying lack of child-specific knowledge and child safeguarding, an inappropriate focus on immigration, low awareness of the NRM, a lack of training and a lack of a formal recovery and reflection period for children.

An overview of these concerns is outlined below:¹¹³

1. Low awareness of the NRM system and child trafficking indicators/definition/profiles among First Responders in particular
2. Low referral rate among some local authorities that see little purpose in the NRM for children
3. Low conclusive grounds rate decision for children (around 31% from April 2009 up until June 2012), which is lower than that of adults, despite the simpler definition of child trafficking
4. Lack of child-specific training and child protection specialism among case owners in the Competent Authorities
5. Potential discrimination in the decision-making process (against specific nationalities, age groups and children generally)
6. Poor decision making that is frequently based on credibility (and often, wrongly, consent) and lacks an understanding of child development and the impact of trauma and abuse on children
7. Lack of a formal appeal system
8. Lack of any independent evaluation/monitoring of the operation of the NRM and any scrutiny, either internally or externally, of decisions made
9. Lack of multi-agency input in the decision-making process
10. Poor communication between First Responders, relevant agencies and the Competent Authorities
11. Conflation between asylum claims and identification within the NRM
12. Lack of policy/guidance on how the NRM fits within the best interests requirement and the duty to create a durable solution for trafficked children in Article 16 of the EU Anti-Trafficking Directive
13. No statutory basis for the NRM, so no requirement to refer, or for First Responders to participate in the identification process
14. Civil standard of proof for a conclusive grounds decision
15. Little known on the impact of NRM decisions on children in the short and long term
16. Lack of input by the child into the NRM process and a lack of understanding of the NRM
17. Lack of long-term evaluation of the NRM and support for child victims of trafficking

The ATMG recommends that the NRM process is embedded within existing child protection systems in the UK so that trafficking, which is child abuse, is not just seen as an 'add-on' or supplementary issue. A recent report by the Fundamental Rights Agency¹¹⁴ states that any child protection system

¹¹² The Anti-Trafficking Monitoring Group. (2014). *Proposal for a revised National Referral Mechanism*. Available at: http://www.ecpat.org.uk/sites/default/files/atmg_national_referral_mechanism_for_children_email.pdf

¹¹³ Ibid

¹¹⁴ Fundamental Rights Agency. (2014). *Guardianship for Children Deprived of Parental Care*. Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/e-library/docs/guardianship_for_children/guardianship_for_children_deprived_of_parental_care_en.pdf

should place the child at the centre, ensuring all essential actors and systems work together to protect the child. In doing so, “such an integrated approach can respond to a variety of situations an individual child can encounter, including child trafficking and other forms of exploitation and abuse”¹¹⁵.

Little information emerged in the research about children who have been identified as trafficked also being witnesses to a crime. Modern slavery is a serious criminal offence, one which carries a life sentence in law across the UK. It is believed that there is low awareness of the status of trafficked children as witnesses and recommended that this should form part of any training for professionals. It should also be considered as another risk factor for missing and emphasised as part of a risk assessment.

Age disputes and assessment

Disputes about a young person’s age and the associated risk of going missing came up repeatedly in the youth workshops, the roundtable with practitioners and the online survey of professionals. Many unaccompanied and trafficked young people are unable to provide evidence of their age, with some not even aware of their chronological age. However, they require a date of birth in order to receive services, including health, education and identity documents.¹¹⁶

It is acknowledged that disputing a child or young person’s age can affect the way they engage with their social worker, and the repeated questioning of their credibility and identity can leave children and young people feeling angry and bewildered.¹¹⁷ The Association of the Directors of Children’s Services states that, in this context, it is important that age assessments are not undertaken unless absolutely necessary.¹¹⁸

Statutory guidance for local authorities on the care of unaccompanied asylum seeking and trafficked children also states that: “Age assessments should only be carried out where there is significant reason to doubt that the claimant is a child. Age assessments should not be a routine part of a local authority’s assessment of unaccompanied and trafficked children.”¹¹⁹

Under the European Trafficking Convention, children who may have been trafficked should be afforded ‘benefit of the doubt’ concerning age, as they may have had their identity changed, their documents removed or forged. They are also often told to lie about their real age. The Convention states: “When the age of the victim is uncertain and there are reasons to believe that the victim is a child, he or she shall be presumed to be a child and shall be accorded special protection measures pending verification of his/her age.”¹²⁰ Both England and Wales’ Modern Slavery Act (2015) and Scotland’s Human Trafficking and Exploitation Act (2015) contain a specific ‘presumption of age’ clause.

The data collected in this research specifically looked at those young people who were under 18. Therefore, it may not include young people who have not been accepted as children by a local authority or where this is still under challenge. Our research indicates that disputes over age have a strong influence on whether a child feels believed by authorities and the trust developed with professionals. In addition, it can strongly influence the type of support and accommodation they receive. Many professionals working with children reported that children had been unlawfully age assessed and accommodated inappropriately with very little support, and had subsequently disappeared. They told us that it is commonly reassessed, after they have disappeared into suspected situations of exploitation, that these were, in fact, children under the age of 18.

¹¹⁵ Ibid

¹¹⁶ Association of Directors of Children’s Services. (2015). *Age Assessment Guidance*. Available at: http://adcs.org.uk/assets/documentation/Age_Assessment_Guidance_2015_Final.pdf

¹¹⁷ Ibid

¹¹⁸ Ibid

¹¹⁹ Department for Education. (2014). *Care of unaccompanied and trafficked children: Statutory guidance for local authorities on the care of unaccompanied asylum seeking and trafficked children*. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/330787/Care_of_unaccompanied_and_trafficked_children.pdf

¹²⁰ Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings. (2005). Article 10(3)

Case study – Kojo

Kojo* is a Ghanaian boy who was trafficked to the UK for the purposes of sexual exploitation. He was exploited at a brothel for more than two years. The police raided the brothel on a number of occasions, but his traffickers hid him under the bed or inside a cupboard so he was not able to ask for help.

When he turned 14, he managed to escape the brothel when his traffickers forgot to lock the door. Kojo asked for help in the street and was told to go to a Home Office building. He went and was asked for a copy of his passport, which he did not have. Kojo was told that if he could not prove he was a child he would be taken to asylum-seeker accommodation for adults. Kojo disclosed his experiences to the immigration staff and his sexual exploitation but no child protection referral was made to the local authority or to the police. He was placed in emergency accommodation in London for around a week.

After this, his traffickers made contact with him and took him back to the brothel, where he remained for another further year. Kojo escaped from the brothel once more, this time jumping from the window of the three-storey house and injuring his arm.

A passer-by in the street took him to a charity who made an urgent referral to a local authority. Kojo was put with a foster family whom he really liked and felt safe for the first time in years. However, an age assessment, which included a physical examination by a doctor, concluded he was 23 and not 15 as he stated. Kojo was very upset about the physical examination and not being believed. He felt ashamed of his sexual exploitation. He was not allowed to stay with the foster family, who, like his specialist trafficking advocates, believed his stated age. Instead, he was moved to semi-independent accommodation where he struggled to cope with daily tasks and felt alienated. Lawyers took up his case to challenge the age assessment.

However, a month after being placed in the new setting, he went missing and has not been found. No one ever referred Kojo to the National Referral Mechanism, despite his disclosures to the Home Office and the local authority. There was also no known investigation of the sexual exploitation that he described.

*Not his real name

3.4 Exploitation and criminalisation

British nationals and child sexual exploitation

The trafficking of UK children is often linked to child sexual exploitation, which can be both a cause and a consequence of going missing. The Office of the Children's Commissioner for England reported that a total of 2,409 children were known to be victims of CSE by gangs and groups. A 2013 inquiry identified 16,500 children and young people as being at risk, and the inquiry identified internal trafficking as a key pattern in CSE.¹²¹ Barnardo's has noted that *"some groups of young people are more vulnerable to targeting by the perpetrators of sexual exploitation. These include children living in care"*¹²². Children going missing from home or care is listed as a key indicator for children who are being sexually exploited.¹²³

Our survey respondents indicated that British children, in particular, were more likely to be recorded as at potential risk of CSE than trafficked. It has been argued that *"an over-emphasis on immigration [...] can mean that children and young people trafficked internally, may go unidentified"*. As mentioned earlier, a sizeable number of our survey respondents perceived that British children were rarely identified as trafficking victims. This suggests that there may be a failure of recognition and identification of trafficking as it relates to sexual exploitation of resident British children.

Many cases of what we call child sexual exploitation are trafficking for sexual exploitation and although referral to the NRM does not at the moment give the child the support they are entitled to under Article 12 of the Council of Europe Convention against Trafficking in Persons, in the case of UK children it does give written confirmation that they have been trafficked. [...] Under UK legislation to prove that a child has been trafficked the points to prove are: that someone arranged or facilitated their movement, and that the intention was to exploit the child during or after the movement. This is much simpler than trying to prove rape, for instance. Once the definition and the legislation are explained to social workers, police and prosecutors, it becomes clear that some children who have been subject to CSE are in fact trafficked victims.

– NGO professional

¹²¹ Office of the Children's Commissioner. (2013). *"If only someone had listened": Office of the Children's Commissioner's Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups: Final Report*. Available at: http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/If_only_someone_had_listened.pdf

¹²² Barnardo's. (2011). *Puppet on a String: The urgent need to cut children free from sexual exploitation*. Available at: http://www.barnardos.org.uk/ctf_puppetonastring_report_final.pdf

¹²³ Office of the Children's Commissioner. (2013). *"If only someone had listened": Office of the Children's Commissioner's Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups: Final Report*. Available at: http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/If_only_someone_had_listened.pdf

In 2015, 105 UK national children were referred to the NRM as suspected victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation, which is far fewer than the estimates of the Children's Commissioner for England. Although this represented an increase of 65% on 2014, it appears that many victims of CSE are not being referred to the NRM and being identified as victims of trafficking.

This issue was highlighted in a recent serious case review by Bristol Safeguarding Children's Board:

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*The risk of sexual exploitation was recognised after two girls aged 15 years old went missing and travelled to other parts of the UK to meet males they had 'met' on Facebook. However, on their return the girls did not themselves make allegations, and the police did not consider they were being groomed so no further investigations were undertaken. However, as a result of this, one young person was appropriately referred to the UKHTC for her to be assessed as victim of internal trafficking... This was good practice but also highlights that there may be an inconsistency regarding whether other children at the time were recognised as potential victims of human trafficking.*¹²⁴

The failure to identify British nationals as possible victims of human trafficking may be due to a lack of understanding of the definition of trafficking, with many practitioners thinking it affects only those who cross international borders. A survey of London social workers found that three-fifths thought a person had to cross an international border to be a victim of trafficking.¹²⁵ In addition, it has been said that the NRM provides little additional benefit to those children referred.¹²⁶

'County lines'

Less is known about the movement of children within the UK for other forms of exploitation, such as activities associated with gang-involvement and drug running. In recent years, the identification of 'county lines' (drug supply networks extending out from cities to smaller towns or coastal resorts) has started to be viewed as potential child trafficking.¹²⁷ Recent media reports have highlighted concerns about an increase in this form of abuse, with children as young as 12 being trafficked to move drugs around the UK.¹²⁸ This phenomenon involves young gang-involved children being

¹²⁴ Bristol Safeguarding Children Board. (2016). *The Brooke Serious Case Review into Child Sexual Exploitation: Identifying the strengths and gaps in the multi-agency responses to child sexual exploitation in order to learn and improve*. Available at: <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/documents/20182/34760/Serious+Case+Review+Operation+Brooke+Overview+Report/3c2008c4-2728-4958-a8ed-8505826551a3>

¹²⁵ Boff, A. (2013). *Shadow City: Exposing human trafficking in everyday London*. Available at: <http://glaconservatives.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Shadow-City.pdf>

¹²⁶ The Anti-Trafficking Monitoring Group. (2014). *Proposal for a Revised National Referral Mechanism (NRM) For Children*. Available at: http://www.ecpat.org.uk/sites/default/files/atmg_national_referral_mechanism_for_children_email.pdf

¹²⁷ Sturrock, R. and Holmes, L. (2015). *Running the Risks: The links between gang involvement and young people going missing. Catch 22 and Missing People*. Available at: <https://www.missingpeople.org.uk/runningtherisks>

¹²⁸ Sky News. (14 January 2015). "Children 'Trafficked' Around UK By Drug Dealers". Available at: <http://news.sky.com/story/children-trafficked-around-uk-by-drug-dealers-10375380>

transported away from home, often having their mobile phone taken away, being supplied with drugs to sell and, sometimes, provided with weapons. While these children are involved in criminal activity, they may also be in exploitative situations whereby older people give them 'payment' of some sort in return for this criminal activity. Local authority survey respondents to our survey identified this issue as a gap in their knowledge.

“

We were not identifying this group enough, especially linked to 'county lines'.

– Social worker

Criminal exploitation

Children who are exploited in criminal activity, including children involved in 'county lines', children exploited to work in cannabis factories and others sometimes find themselves criminalised (arrested, cautioned, prosecuted) for this activity. Others may be criminalised because of their immigration status.

Professional survey respondents were asked whether being criminalised (for example, being arrested or prosecuted) had an impact on *trafficked* children going missing. There was a strong perception that this was the case, particularly amongst NGOs (65%), but also within criminal justice respondents, 38% of whom said this was usually or sometimes the case as opposed to 10% who thought it rarely or never had an impact. Professionals perceived four ways that being or feeling criminalised affects trafficked children and makes them more likely to go missing:

- Fostering distrust in authorities
- Confirming what traffickers have said about police/authorities
- Leads to vulnerabilities being dismissed
- Leads to a fear of the police

“

We are finding that young people that are criminalised become increasingly scared and worried for their future and believe that this themselves that are in the wrong and will tend to believe any pre-conceived ideas the trafficker may have told them about how the authorities will treat them. This, in turn, at times can lead them to go missing and go return to their traffickers, believing they have no other choice.

– NGO professional

However, there was evidence from the survey that some criminal justice respondents were increasingly aware of the vulnerabilities of trafficked children:

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In some cases of children with a criminal past, others may tend to look upon them differently and dismiss their vulnerabilities. Those children that regularly miss school and go missing from home are at risk, but sometimes maybe others look upon them as street wise when they are the ones that need guidance and support.

– Criminal justice professional

“

Yes. They distrust all authorities (including social services and sometimes even lawyers) as a result of their detention/incarceration. They are more prone to contact their traffickers and get in touch with them as a result of these experiences.

– Lawyer

“

Children who have been criminalised (and/or age disputed and receiving negative decisions from the immigration authorities) present as having developed a distrust in the authorities as well as constant fear of being re-detained. This can lead to feelings of hopelessness and may explain why they might resume contact with their traffickers.

– Legal services professional

The link between missing and the criminalisation of a trafficked child has been highlighted in data collected by the NSPCC¹²⁹, which found that of 715 referrals to its Child Trafficking Advice Centre, 161 had been reported missing at some time. Of those, 73 were ‘still missing’ at the time, 26 had been found, 11 had returned and 18 were classed as ‘unknown’. Of those who went missing, 58% were being exploited for criminal activity (street-based crimes) and cannabis cultivation. However, there was evidence from the survey that some criminal justice respondents were increasingly aware of the vulnerabilities of trafficked children.

Heading back to harm finds that it is often these children, who are commonly identified in situations of criminality via police raids or arrests, who disappear following arrest on bail or once out of custody and end up in situations of re-trafficking and exploitation. Practitioners expressed concern that these children were seen as criminals first and that this affected their perceived risk of missing and vulnerability. For example, many examples were given of trafficked children (or those suspected to have been trafficked) disappearing whilst on bail, but priority was given to them being

¹²⁹ NSPCC. (2012). *NSPCC Response to All Party Parliamentary Group on Runaway and Missing Children and Adults*. Available at: <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/globalassets/documents/consultation-responses/nspcc-response-missing-children-inquiry.pdf>

'criminals' and they were officially recorded as 'absconders' or 'wanted'. This was often cited as the case when children turned 18 whilst 'still missing' and so went from being perceived as vulnerable children to adult criminals or illegal immigrants if they did not have status in the UK.

Case study – Bao

Bao* was discovered in the back of a lorry in Sussex in 2010, along with another 15 year old, having been smuggled into the UK. Both boys were taken into local authority care. However, within weeks both disappeared from foster care with no cash or belongings. They spoke almost no English.

Bao later revealed to an NGO that before getting on the lorry, he had been given a SIM card and told someone would call him on his arrival in the UK. Whilst he was in foster care, the phone rang but Bao gave it to his foster carer as he was too scared to answer. The phone was removed from Bao after this. Not long after this, he ran away and met up with the other boy. They were taken to a cannabis factory and told they had to work to pay off a debt. He was beaten and threatened.

In 2014, by now a young adult, Bao was found by police in a cannabis factory. Despite telling the officers that he had been threatened and was in debt bondage, he was prosecuted and convicted of cannabis cultivation. Bao was sentenced to prison and recommended for deportation to Vietnam. He was released from prison into immigration detention where he was referred by an NGO to the National Referral Mechanism as a suspected victim of trafficking.

Three months after his referral (instead of the recommended five days), Bao received a negative first-stage NRM decision ('reasonable grounds' decision), despite the NRM decision recognising he had been a child when he went missing and ended up in a cannabis factory. There was no mention of any inquiries to the police or the local authority from when he was 15 and had gone missing. The NRM decision claimed that the presence of a phone when Bao was arrested in the cannabis factory meant he was not under the control of traffickers (despite this being a known technique to control victims). After the threat of legal action over the negative reasonable grounds, the decision was reversed and Bao was given a positive 'reasonable grounds' stage decision. However, a later conclusive grounds decision was negative.

Lawyers managed to secure Bao's release from detention. However, he went missing from an adult safe house in 2015 and has not been found. It is thought he is once again in a situation of exploitation.

*not his real name

It is clear that the reasons why a child who is trafficked or unaccompanied goes missing is hugely complex, with no one clear influencing factor. More in-depth research is needed to understand the links between the causal factors, as well as better data on the demographics of those who go missing, such as gender and age. However, this research determines that there are many issues that appear to have a strong bearing on the risk of going missing, including issues around age disputes, exploitation type, criminalisation, nationality, immigration concerns and identification of trafficking risk. At a more basic level, young people reported feeling isolated and not believed. The lack of trust with adults tasked with their safeguarding was seen to be a key determiner of risk of missing. The next chapter will discuss how professionals should respond to the risk of missing and potential solutions for prevention.



**"What do I need
from you to help
me stay safe?"**

4 How should professionals respond to the risk of children going missing?

This chapter will examine the views of young people and professionals on key measures to prevent missing episodes and safeguard separated and trafficked children in care. It will also look at the assessment of risk for these children and review interventions in the UK that seek to: prevent trafficked, unaccompanied and separated children from going missing; find missing children quickly and safely; and respond effectively once the child is found. Recommendations relating to each area are listed at the end of the relevant section, and then summarised at the end of the report.

In a 2011 report entitled *On the Safe Side*, ECPAT UK detailed 10 principles for the safe accommodation of child victims of trafficking. Through research ECPAT UK had identified that there were no commonly agreed safety and protection standards across the UK for the placement of children who are suspected or known to be trafficked.¹³⁰

In 2014 Missing Children Europe (MCE) and partners launched the joint EU-funded SUMMIT project, *Safeguarding Unaccompanied Minors from going Missing by Identifying Best Practices and Training Actors on Interagency Cooperation*. In early 2016, MCE and the University of Portsmouth

produced the *SUMMIT Report*, detailing areas of good practice. The *SUMMIT report* identified a number of areas of practice which are challenging yet vital for the successful response to unaccompanied children going missing. These areas include: collecting identifying information; assessing the likelihood of a child going missing; informing children about processes and their rights; multi-agency collaboration; clarity of responsibilities (around reporting and responding); search activities; and responding when a child is found.

Reviewing best practice in the UK

Survey participants and roundtable attendees for *Heading back to harm* were asked to reflect on areas of practice that can improve the response to trafficked, unaccompanied and separated children who are placed in care, with the aims of: preventing them from going missing; finding them swiftly and safely if they go missing; and supporting them effectively when they return from being missing. The findings of this research project build upon and extend the areas of European good practice identified in the *SUMMIT report* and the principles for the safe accommodation of child victims of trafficking developed by ECPAT UK, and highlights areas of good practice in the UK.

¹³⁰ ECPAT UK. (2011). *On the Safe Side*. Available at: http://www.ecpat.org.uk/sites/default/files/on_the_safe_side.pdf

The survey respondents named a number of specific projects and organisations as examples of good practice in the UK, several of which are highlighted in case studies in this report. Respondents also highlighted the following characteristics and practice that they felt was important when working with trafficked and unaccompanied children:

- Effective multi-agency partnerships, meetings and information sharing
- Close engagement between children and appropriate support networks, e.g. legal representatives, child trafficking advocates, mental health services, mentors, education and training services
- Provision of specialist foster care, and appropriate training and information given to foster carers
- Use of 'return home interviews' as a means of gathering intelligence and supporting children
- Careful risk assessment and risk management planning, along with close monitoring of victims and potential victims
- Immediate safety planning and work with children to inform them of risks and to gather information about traffickers
- Training for all professionals who come into contact with trafficking victims
- Peer support and mentoring for children and young people
- Measures to restrict communication between children and traffickers, e.g. removing phones, escorting them for outings and restricting internet access
- Accommodating children in secure units and CCTV

The perceived effectiveness of interventions

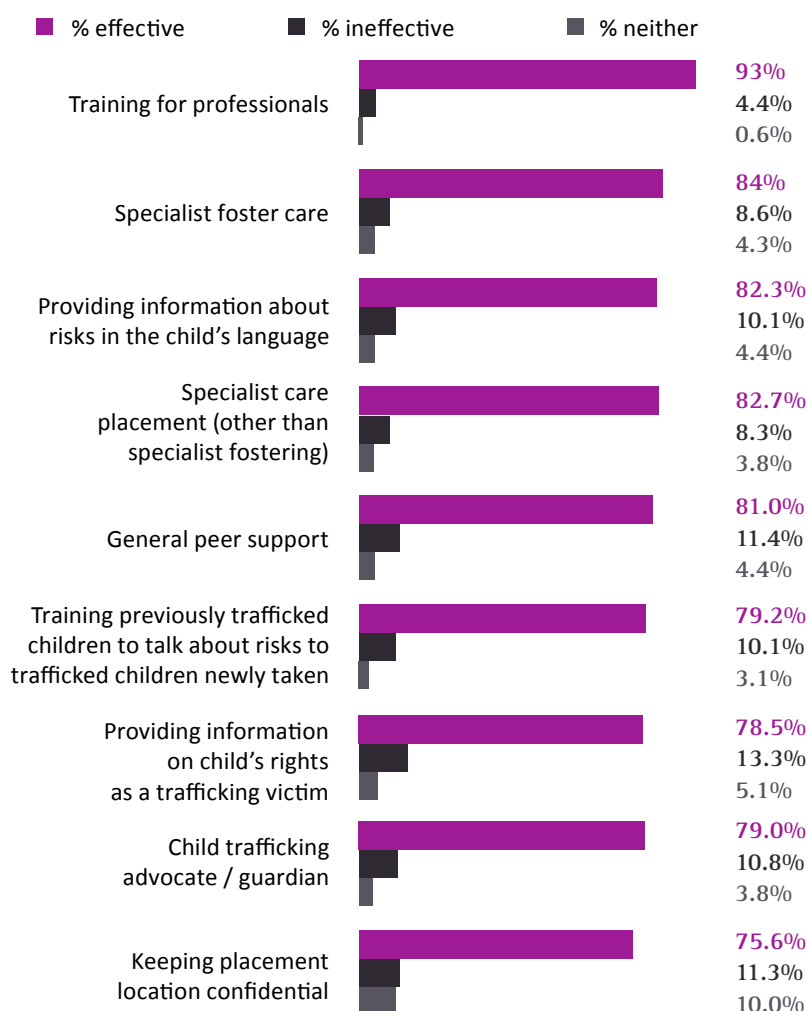
For the *Heading back to harm* research, professional respondents to the project survey were asked to review a list of potential actions, and to say how effective they thought each would be for preventing trafficked children from going missing. **Figure 13** below illustrates the overall responses to this question.

Training for professionals in contact with trafficked, unaccompanied and separated children was the most highly rated intervention, followed by specialist foster care placements – both interventions which would ensure that children encountered knowledgeable professionals and carers. This reflects survey responses that show a dearth of understanding of the issues among respondents, and professionals and carers more widely.

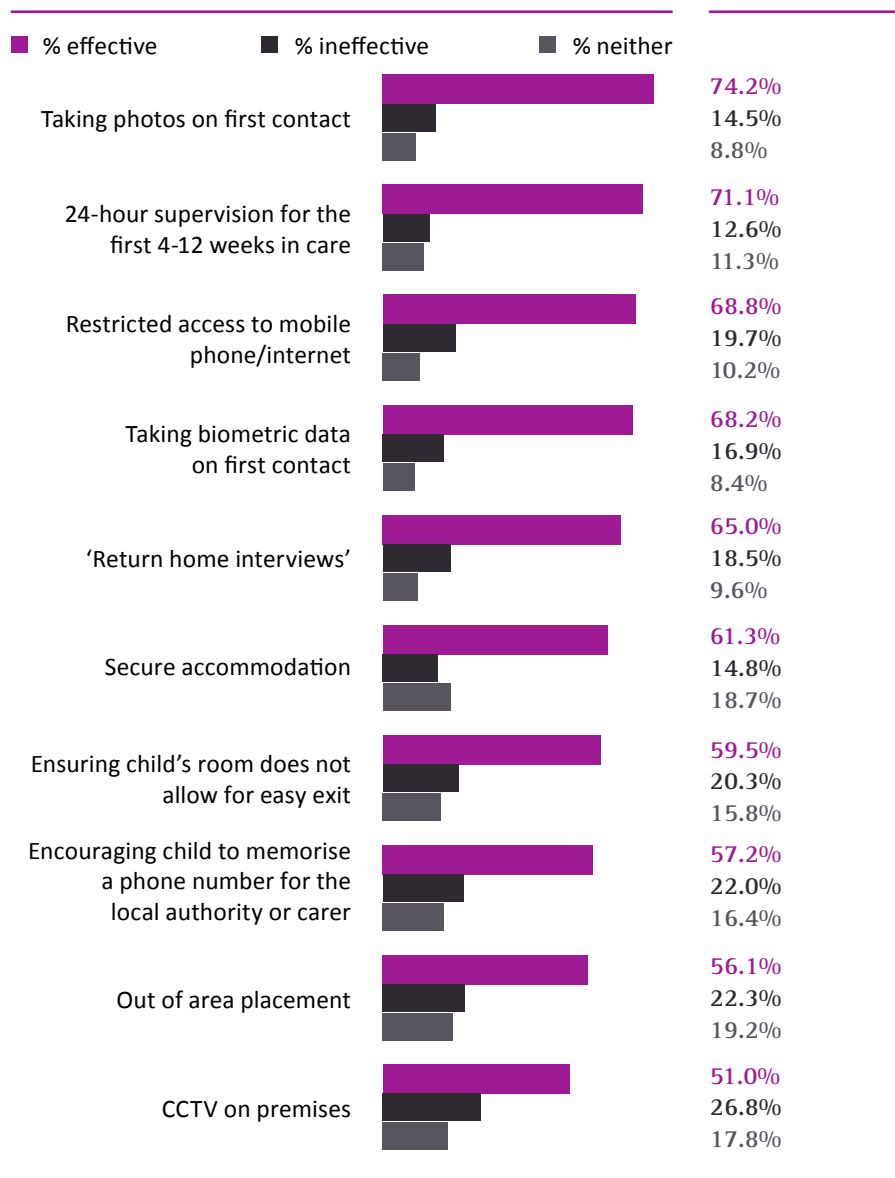
Conversely, interventions associated with surveillance or restricting the child's rights, such as CCTV, 24 hour surveillance, secure accommodation or restricting access to mobile phones or the internet, were rated less highly. These factors are discussed in more detail below.

Figure 13¹³¹

Table showing perceived effectiveness of interventions



¹³¹ This analysis is taken from 250 completed questionnaires from professionals. For each intervention, this chart shows the percentage of non-blank responses to each scale item, the number of which ranged from 154 to 162.

Figure 13**Table showing perceived effectiveness of interventions (continued)**

4.1. Creating a culture of trust

Building trust and belonging

The workshops carried out with the ECPAT UK youth groups highlighted the importance that young people placed on the need to feel listened to, understood and believed, and feel a sense of belonging in their environment.

These views are supported in the Department for Education's *Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care*, which emphasises listening to a child as a factor in minimising the chances of a child running away. This is said to be particularly important when it concerns placement decisions and moves.¹³²

The ECPAT UK youth groups ranked 14 measures which could help prevent missing from care episodes by trafficked or unaccompanied children. Those highest ranking measures are explained below:

1) Having foster carers who understand my needs

This ranked highest overall with a young person commenting that they wanted a *“new life, to feel comfortable (and a) foster carer (that) could help them”*. Foster carers who are specially trained to understand the problems trafficked and unaccompanied children might experience can be invaluable, especially in the early stages of a trafficked child's placement in care.

2) Having an advocate who will explain official processes to you, go to meetings with you and look out for your best interests

The young people felt that they needed someone who could *“explain how to be safe”; “help (them) to learn English”; and could “make life easier”*. They would be more likely to contact an advocate like this than the police if they went missing and were scared because of a previously established level of trust in the relationship.

3) Hearing from young people who have had similar experiences

The participants felt that the opportunity to hear from other trafficked children was important, because they could relate to their experiences and they could learn from them about potential risks.

4) Making new friends

The young people placed importance on having the support and friendship of other children in care as a reason to stay in their placements, as it provided them with a greater sense of belonging.

5) Receiving information (in relevant language) about rights as victims of trafficking

The young people felt this information could help to keep them safe and reject the approaches of traffickers or strangers, who could give them bad advice.

6) Being encouraged to memorise a phone number for safe adults who can help

The young people felt that this could assist someone to get help if they went missing and felt unsafe.

¹³² Department for Education. (2013). *Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care*. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/307867/Statutory_Guidance_-_Missing_from_care__3_.pdf

The feedback from the young people who have been trafficked identifies some key priorities for preventing missing episodes, with the requirement to have trained, knowledgeable carers and the support of advocates or guardians with whom relationships of trust can be established rating most highly.

Different systems of guardianship/advocacy currently exist within the UK, and it is concerning that in all administrations of the UK, despite commitments in legislation, there has been a delay in rolling out statutory services to provide an independent advocate or guardian. In addition, in England and Wales the legislation focuses solely on those children identified as potential victims of trafficking, not the wider group of separated children, and thus falls short of what has been committed to in legislation in Scotland and Northern Ireland. Despite its stated commitment to the scheme, the Home Office has delayed a national roll-out to potentially 2019, instead focusing on three 'early adopter' sites in Greater Manchester, Hampshire and Wales. This means that many children in parts of England, in particular, will continue to be deprived of independent advocacy. It is also a concern that in Scotland, national children are excluded from the statutory guardianship provisions, meaning Scottish children who are trafficked will not benefit from the provisions in law.

Peer support and mentoring

“

The children we come into contact with have spent many months with those who are trafficking them, they have been given legends and are groomed to mistrust authorities, the only way we can reverse this is through specialist support, education and peer support.

– Criminal justice professional

GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE 1: CREATING A CULTURE OF TRUST

Scottish Guardianship Service

Launched in 2010, the Scottish Guardianship Service supports young asylum seekers in Scotland, providing a single independent person to help them to navigate asylum and immigration processes. The service was independently evaluated in 2013.

A Guardian is “an independent person who will support a separated child to improve their knowledge and understanding of the asylum, trafficking, legal and welfare processes and will assist them to actively participate within these processes. A Guardian will advocate on a

young person's behalf, will ensure their needs are being met and will assist a young person to parallel plan for their future to prepare the young person for whatever the outcome, either integration or return.”¹³³

The service works with young people who arrive in Scotland as separated children under 18 years of age, who are a new presentation to the authorities after 1 September 2010, and who are seeking asylum or have been trafficked from outside the EU. It also works with anyone who is being treated as a child under 18 but is age-disputed and is undergoing an age assessment.

The independent evaluation of the service in 2013 found¹³⁴:

- A clear definition and understanding of the SGS
- Good communication and information sharing between the SGS and referring agencies
- Guardians were committed to creating safe and sustaining relationships with young people, based on mutual trust, openness and confidentiality
- Guardians added value across three domains: asylum, well-being and social networks
- Guardians advocate in the best interests of the child
- Guardians ensure young people's participation in decision making
- Guardians, in partnership with others, protect young people's safety
- Guardians ensure timely implementation of durable solutions for young people
- Guardians treat children and young people with respect and dignity

Recommendation 1:

Child specific training for professionals and carers

In order to address the lack of awareness of the issues and risks faced by trafficked, unaccompanied and separated children, and to ensure that care providers understand and respond to needs effectively, anyone working with such children must be trained to an appropriate level.

i) Police forces and local authorities must provide police staff and officers, and social workers with mandatory training covering, but not limited to, the following topics:

- Definition and nature of trafficking, exploitation and modern slavery in the UK
- Identifying and safeguarding trafficked, unaccompanied and separated children
- Child protection

¹³⁴ Crawley H., Kohli R. (2013) *She endures with me*. 2013. Available at: http://www.aberlour.org.uk/assets/0001/0362/Final_Report_2108__ISDN.pdf

- Risks specifically faced by children and young adults
- Balancing risks and rights
- Care planning and risk assessment
- Responding to suspected or potential trafficking
- Using the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) and available legislation

ii. Local authorities must provide foster carers and professionals who work with trafficked, unaccompanied and separated children with appropriate, quality and regular face-to-face training.

iii. All training must aim to break down the culture of disbelief, must encourage anyone in contact with trafficked, unaccompanied and separated children to recognise and understand their vulnerability, and must promote a culture of trust.

Recommendation 2: Building a culture of trust with trafficked, unaccompanied and separated children

In order to build trust with trafficked, unaccompanied and separated children, to prevent them going missing, all agencies providing support must ensure that a child's first and subsequent encounters with services are supportive and that next steps are clearly explained.

i. On their first encounter with statutory services all trafficked, unaccompanied and separated children must be treated with respect and their accounts given credence. Staff members who are likely to encounter this group of children must receive appropriate training as stated in Recommendation 1.

ii. Service providers should make available peer support from children and young people with similar experiences; this could be face-to-face, in facilitated groups or through written or audio-visual media. An example of this would be short films explaining processes and risks in a range of languages, featuring previously trafficked children.

iii. Service providers and carers must provide children with accessible information about how they can get help if they go missing and at other points in their journey. This should include local services and Missing People's national, 24/7 free and confidential Runaway Helpline, available by phone and text to 116000.

iv. Trafficked, unaccompanied and separated children should be accommodated within a supportive environment where they have access to culturally appropriate services, occupation (education or training), food, language, religious practice and compassionate care.

Recommendation 3: Independent Child Trafficking Advocates/Guardians

In order to protect the rights and promote the wellbeing of trafficked, unaccompanied and separated children, the Government should urgently introduce a consistent, effective national system of legal, independent guardianship for all of these children across the UK. This system should be available until a young person is at least 21 years of age.

4.2. Responding to risk

Those measures that participants in the young person's focus group ranked the most ineffective at stopping children from going missing were:

- 1) Accommodation where the child is not allowed to leave
- 2) Having restricted access to mobile phone/internet
- 3) Having CCTV on premises
- 4) Having a room in accommodation that does not allow easy exit, for example, is on an upper floor

The formerly trafficked young people at the workshops rejected measures that they felt did not encourage children to stay in their placement and engage with services. They expressed a preference for what they considered a positive not negative environment, and described a level of support which had a balance between helping them feel safe and secure, whilst giving them choices and not being too restrictive.

Case Study from Harrow Council

In 2011, Harrow Council issued its updated *Good Practice Guidance for Trafficked Children in Care*¹³⁵ which can be obtained from: www.londonscb.gov.uk/trafficking.

The guidance is for social care and education professionals, foster carers and residential staff in contact with trafficked children in care, and was developed within the context of the London Safeguarding Children Board *London Safeguarding Trafficked Children Toolkit*.¹³⁶

¹³⁵ Harrow Council. (2011). *Good Practice Guidance for Trafficked Children in Care*. Available at: www.londonscb.gov.uk/trafficking

¹³⁶ London Safeguarding Children Board. (2011). *London Safeguarding Trafficked Children Toolkit*. Available at: http://www.ecpat.org.uk/sites/default/files/london_safeguarding_trafficked_children_toolkit_feb_2011.pdf

Many of the recommended actions are about safeguarding child victims of trafficking and prevention of missing, in order to disrupt links with traffickers and address the risk of going missing.

The Harrow best practice guidance recommends the following steps to address the high risk of trafficked children going missing:

- The child's care plan must include a risk assessment and a contingency plan if the child goes missing – this could be agreeing with police a rapid response model to track the child's likely movements when they have gone missing.
- To support this approach, a missing child route map should be built into a risk assessment to identify routes the child might take if he or she were to go missing from the placement, such as local train or tube stations, bus stops, cab offices or main roads if picked up by a trafficker. This information can be shared with the police when agreeing a rapid response model.
- The placement has a key role to play in monitoring risks and developing, alongside children's social care and the police, the risk assessment missing route map.

Safe accommodation and placement planning

Respondents to the survey of professionals referenced foster care placements where carers or support workers possessed little awareness or experience of caring for trafficked or unaccompanied migrant children as being associated with trafficked and separated children going missing. Such children can have a range of complex needs resulting from previous trauma or exploitation and may also be subject to processes such as immigration applications or criminal investigations into their trafficking or exploitation in forced criminality. They are also potentially witnesses to the crime of modern slavery and human trafficking, which carries a life sentence in the UK. This should be considered an additional risk factor in safety planning.

“

(Children go missing from) placements where staff have no or limited experience of the needs of trafficked children, are insensitive to cultural values and behaviours, and lack knowledge of the effect of trauma and its behavioural manifestations.

– NGO professional

Other survey respondents emphasised the vulnerability of emergency accommodation, such as hostels or B&Bs:

“Placements that have no understanding of trafficking and how to safeguard are more likely to be associated with missing children. Unsafe properties such as B&Bs, emergency accommodation and independent provisions will be more likely to have children go missing from them. Foster placements where foster carers have no prior knowledge and/or no support during the ‘golden hours’ will more likely to be associated with children going missing.

– NGO professional

The availability of appropriate accommodation/placements which local authorities could use to meet the needs of unaccompanied migrant children and potentially trafficked children was a concern for many professionals responding to the survey:

“The care provision for UASC is completely unacceptable. Often they are placed in assessment centres for age assessment and whilst I understand the associated risks for some that appear a lot older than the age given, those that are children are exposed to other risks and are able to access telephones and contact their traffickers because the locations are insecure. We need therapeutic facilities where children can be supported and de-briefed in a safe environment. Once age assessed they are placed in ‘supported’ accommodation which again is wholly inadequate.

– Criminal justice professional

Statutory guidance for local authorities on the care of unaccompanied asylum seeking and trafficked children states that when placement planning:

“Taking steps that may be perceived by the child as punitive could put them at more risk of going missing. Efforts to protect the child should not replicate those that may have been used by traffickers to control the child. Involving the child in the development of their protection plan can help reduce this risk.”¹³⁷

This view is supported by the youth group participants, who expressed strong views that all children should be involved in planning for their placements. As trafficked children, their experiences often led them to feel they had no choice or control about where they ended up, and this they argued could lead to a

¹³⁷ Department for Education. (2014). *Care of unaccompanied and trafficked children: Statutory guidance for local authorities on the care of unaccompanied asylum seeking and trafficked children*. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/330787/Care_of_unaccompanied_and_trafficked_children.pdf

child with a similar background believing they could take back control if they left.

“

I thought I might be better off on my own.

– Member of ECPAT UK youth group for young victims of trafficking

In 2011, Barnardo's received funding from the Department for Education to deliver a two-year pilot of specialist foster care for sexually exploited/trafficked young people. An independent evaluation of this found there was “*clear potential for specialist placements to be cost effective*,” and, where developed as part of a model of specialist support, can effectively protect trafficked young people and help them recover from their abuse.¹³⁸ Although this was a relatively small pilot, the Joint Committee on Human Rights recommended the approach be explored further and more widely.¹³⁹

Secure accommodation and intensive supervision

The survey of professionals explored the use of secure care setting for accommodating trafficked or unaccompanied children, using both ranking and open-ended questions, and revealed a divergence of opinion across different professional groups. A far higher proportion of criminal justice professionals (mostly serving police officers) believed secure accommodation to be effective than did local authority professionals.¹⁴⁰

“

Secure accommodation is likely to provide the greatest protection from further exploitation and break the chain to the trafficker.

– Criminal justice professional

Ongoing links to traffickers, previously identified as a key driver for missing incidents, may be disrupted but not permanently severed by accommodating a child in a secure placement. Findings of this research reveal tension between groups of professionals, and between some professionals and the young people who took part in research workshops; whilst secure accommodation can prevent children from being re-trafficked, used alone it does not combat children's feelings of mistrust, social isolation and being out of control.

¹³⁸ Shuker, L. (2013). *Evaluation of Barnardo's safe accommodation project for sexually exploited and trafficked young people*. Available at: http://www.barnardos.org.uk/resources/research_and_publications/evaluation-of-barnardos-safe-accommodation-project-for-sexually-exploited-and-trafficked-young-people/publication-view.jsp?pid=PUB-2340

¹³⁹ Joint Committee on Human Rights. (2013). *Human rights of unaccompanied migrant children and young people in the UK: First report of the session 2013-14*.

¹⁴⁰ All differences in response between groups of professionals are statistically significant to the 5% (0.05) level, standard in social sciences, unless otherwise stated.

“Children in specialist foster placements will have carers with a high degree of awareness who can take preventative steps. This is better than 24-hour supervision or secure (accommodation), which only defers the risks until the inevitable relaxation.”

– Social worker

An alternative perspective from the professionals' survey, however, suggests that intensive supervision may, in fact, serve to make trafficked and unaccompanied children aware that their carers are concerned for their safety:

“24-hour supervision is vital in order to monitor the child but also to reassure them that the carers actually care.”

– Education professional

Local authority respondents (mostly social workers) were less supportive than criminal justice professionals of intensive supervision or surveillance. This chimes with input from the young people who took part in research workshops, reflecting their comments that they need to feel trusted. This reduced support for intensive supervision may also be influenced by concern about the resources it requires.

Robust risk assessment

Risk assessment is a critical aspect of a missing person investigation. Higher levels of police action will be linked to those missing child cases designated as high risk.

Police guidance on the management, recording and investigation of missing persons grades cases into the categories set out below:

- **High risk:** The risk posed is immediate and there is substantial grounds for believing that the subject is in danger through their own vulnerability, as a victim of serious crime, or the public is in danger
- **Medium risk:** The risk posed is likely to place the subject in danger, or they are a threat to themselves or others
- **Low risk:** There is no apparent threat of danger to either the subject or the public. Under 18s should not be included in this classification¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹ Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO). (2005). *Guidance on the Management, Recording and Investigation of Missing Persons*: Available at: <http://library.college.police.uk/docs/acpo/Missing-Persons-2005-ACPO-Guidance.pdf>

In April 2013, a fourth category, ‘absent’, was introduced and has had a staggered implementation across police forces in England and Wales.¹⁴² In 2016, Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) inspected the police response to missing children and found issues around the definitions and lack of consistent use of the ‘absent’ and missing categories.¹⁴³ A 2016 Inquiry by the APPG for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults strongly recommended that *“the separate ‘absent’ category should be abandoned by the police and missing children should instead receive a proportionate response based on the risks they face”*¹⁴⁴.

Our survey respondents were asked whether the police force in their area used the ‘absent’ definition for trafficked children reported as missing and half (50%) did not know. Of the criminal justice responses received, 13% did not know and approaching 20% answered yes or sometimes. Missing People and ECPAT UK have expressed significant concerns about whether the ‘absent’ category effectively safeguards vulnerable children and believe that the category should not be used in this context.¹⁴⁵

HMIC also identified that police and law enforcement do not consistently identify the risk to children of going missing and the links to child sexual exploitation, trafficking and other forms of abuse and exploitation.¹⁴⁶ As has been established earlier in this research, looked-after children who go missing, or who are away from placement without authorisation, can also be at increased risk of sexual or other forms of exploitation or of involvement in drugs, gangs, criminal activity or trafficking.¹⁴⁷ Risk assessments need to pay particular attention to repeat episodes of missing in this context.

Inherent in any robust and comprehensive risk assessment should be considerations of a child’s risk or previous exposure to multiple forms of exploitation, such as CSE, trafficking and modern slavery, based on multi-agency input, to ensure an appropriate police response. This level of risk assessment should also apply to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and separated children, who remain ‘particularly vulnerable’ to exploitation once in the UK. According to statutory guidance, **those who go missing immediately after becoming looked after should be treated as potential victims of trafficking**, and therefore at greater risk of further exploitation.¹⁴⁸ Despite this guidance, in practice, this frequently does not happen.

The survey asked respondents whether all unaccompanied children who go missing should be considered trafficked or at risk of trafficking. The group most strongly disagreeing with this contention was criminal justice respondents, almost 30% tended to or strongly disagreed.

An early missing incident, or repeated episodes of missing, should be considered an indication of trafficking for all children entering the care system, with the implication being that the child requires a new risk assessment and that there is greater likelihood of them being at risk.

Most professionals in the survey indicated that medium or high-risk categories are generally assigned to missing children where a trafficking concern is highlighted, but there were also concerns noted about a reluctance to increase risk levels to high in some cases:

¹⁴³ HMIC. (2016). *Missing children: who cares? The police response to missing and ‘absent’ children*. Available at: <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmic/publications/missing-children-who-cares/>

¹⁴⁴ All Party Parliamentary Group on Runaway and Missing Children and Adults. (2016). *Inquiry into the safeguarding of ‘absent’ children*. Available at: https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/appg-absent-inquiry-final-report-may-2016-embargoed_0.pdf

¹⁴⁵ Missing People. (26 May 2016). *The ‘absent’ category – safeguarding children and vulnerable adults*. Available at: <https://www.missingpeople.org.uk/latest-news/762-the-absent-category-safeguarding-children-and-vulnerable-adults.html>

¹⁴⁶ HMIC. (2016). *Missing children: who cares? The police response to missing and ‘absent’ children*. Available at: <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmic/publications/missing-children-who-cares/>

¹⁴⁷ Department for Education. (2014). *Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care*. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/307867/Statutory_Guidance_-_Missing_from_care__3_.pdf

¹⁴⁸ Ibid

“We often advocated to the officers in charge of the investigation to raise the risk category to high so that the mobile can be tracked and other measures, but they almost always refused saying there was no evidence the young person was re-trafficked or in immediate harm.”

– NGO professional

Almost 30% of the criminal justice survey respondents (14 respondents) disagreed or strongly disagreed that their organisation provided sufficient training and knowledge around trafficking and missing risks. This raises concerns because a lack of training would impede an investigating officer’s ability to recognise trafficking indicators and therefore to effectively assess risk.

Concerns were also expressed from the survey responses that once a missing child turned 18, a perception of their continued vulnerability and level of risk was affected.

“My experience is that (risk level) varies depending on the police force/circumstances but it is generally high. However, I am concerned that as soon as the child turns 18 the risk category seems to drop as they’re no longer a child (I don’t understand this given that they were missing when a child and are still at risk even if they’re now an adult).”

– Immigration professional

Little is known about those young people who turn 18 and the link to going missing. Previous research has found this to be an area of concern: *“Data on care leavers is extremely patchy and inconsistent across local authorities. As a result, little is known about what happens to young people after they reach 18 years old.”*¹⁴⁹

Searching for missing children

Compared to local authority respondents to the survey, criminal justice respondents (mostly serving police officers) showed higher levels of support for the use of biometric monitoring, whereby biometric data such as fingerprints is taken from young people on first contact. While biometric data collection may not have any

¹⁴⁹ Humphris R. and Signa N. (2016). *Becoming Adult: Mapping unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in England*. Available at: https://becomingadultproject.files.wordpress.com/2016/07/research-brief-series-01_2016.pdf

impact on whether a child goes missing from care, it may be stored and used to identify the child if they later come to attention.

“

Taking photos and biometrics immediately is important as this will assist in identifying the children if they're located but it won't prevent them from going missing to start with.

– Immigration professional

“

Taking biometric data is vital because if the child is not found quickly and has not been recorded with the correct details in the first instance he or she may not be identified as being recorded as missing on their subsequent interactions with police. If we have their fingerprints, then we can match them up to the details of someone who has been recorded as missing.

– Criminal justice professional

Nearly three-quarters of the survey respondents who ranked interventions believed that taking a photograph of a trafficked or unaccompanied child when they entered care was an effective response to the risk of missing incidents. Good quality photographs allow for missing person appeals to be created and circulated to relevant networks; although this should always be balanced against the potential risks to the child of publicising their disappearance.¹⁵⁰

GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE 2: RESPONDING TO RISK

Glasgow CPC Vulnerability Procedures¹⁵¹

In 2000 Glasgow CPC issued the 'Vulnerability Procedures' inter agency guidance for workers involved with young people who were considered to be very vulnerable and at risk of significant harm. The 'procedures' detailed how agencies and services are required to work together to protect some of the most vulnerable children in Glasgow.

These 'procedures' were drawn up in response to the recognition within Glasgow that there is a significant number of children and young people who, through their own behaviour, or as a consequence of others' behaviour towards them, are at considerable risk of significant harm. The procedures are intended to give guidance on assessment, decision making and coordination of a multi-agency response to the complex needs of this group of children/young people. It is recognised that often young people may be involved in a number of high-risk activities, and that managing and supporting children/young people will often be demanding and progress very difficult to measure or achieve. The aims and

¹⁵⁰ Sturrock, R. and Holmes, L. (2015). *Running the Risks: The links between gang involvement and young people going missing. Catch 22 and Missing People*. Available at: <https://www.missingpeople.org.uk/runningtherisks>

¹⁵¹ Glasgow Child Protection Committee. (2009). *Vulnerable Children & Young People at Risk of Significant Harm: Inter Agency Procedure & Practitioner Guidance (Updated Vulnerability Procedures)*.

objectives of the procedures include:

- Provide practical support for children/young people who are identified as vulnerable and at risk of significant harm
- Support children/young people in making the decision to take responsibility for themselves and to encourage them to make positive lifestyle choices
- Ensure that children/young people are viewed holistically and that their behaviour/activities are understood within the context of the child/young person's environment

These procedures will apply to children who are looked after or who are assessed as a child in need and whose behaviour causes concern under one or several of the vulnerability groups, which includes:

- Children/Young People Who Regularly go Missing from Home or Their Care Placement for More Than 24 Hours, and Where Concern Has Been Expressed About Their Safety and Well Being (consider regularity of absconding, pattern, possible destinations, absconding with others/alone, level of risk)
- Children/Young People Who Have Been Trafficked (known or suspected, internal within the UK and external from another country)

GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE 3: RESPONDING TO RISK AND MULTI-AGENCY WORKING

Operation Newbridge¹⁵²

Operation Newbridge, launched in 2008, coordinates partners in West Sussex, focussed particularly around Gatwick Airport, to reduce the number of foreign national children going missing from care. Operation Newbridge involves the Home Office, local police and Gatwick Children's Services.

Children under 18 years who arrive at Gatwick airport, or who come to attention as potential victims of organised immigration crime, human trafficking and exploitation, fall under Operation Newbridge multi-agency protocols. Under these protocols, a number of safeguarding actions are available, including provision of accommodation staffed by trained specialist workers, voluntary 24-hour protection plans, restricting access to mobile phones and the internet, and sessions with a key worker.

¹⁵² West Sussex County Council. (2012). *Trafficking Protocol*. Available at: https://www.westsussex.gov.uk/media/3103/trafficking_protocol.pdf and ECPAT UK. 2010. *Child Trafficking in the UK: A Snapshot*. Available at: http://www.ecpat.org.uk/sites/default/files/child_trafficking_in_the_uk_a_snapshot.pdf

Recommendation 4: Safe and appropriate accommodation

All trafficked, unaccompanied and separated children must be accommodated in appropriate placements in order to build trust, promote wellbeing and prevent missing incidents.

- i. The views and voices of trafficked, unaccompanied and separated children must be taken into account by local authorities when planning placements.
- ii. Trafficked, unaccompanied and separated children must be placed in safe and appropriate environments, such as with trained foster carers or other specialist provision.
- iii. There must be adequate provision in the area to meet local need. Accommodation must have trained staff or foster carers, and timely provision of support to meet individual children's needs.
- iv. The Government must publish detailed plans and a timetable for an independent review of local authority support (including accommodation) for trafficked children. The review that has already been announced¹⁵³ should be expanded to encompass support for unaccompanied children, trafficked children from outside the European economic area and trafficked British nationals. The Government must urgently act upon the findings of the review to ensure adequate resourcing and provision of specialist support for those at risk of trafficking.

¹⁵³ House of Commons Hansard. (28 June 2016). "Independent Advocates for Trafficked Children". Available at: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2016-06-28/debates/16062854000001/IndependentAdvocatesForTraffickedChildren>

¹⁵⁴ Department for Education. (2014). *Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care*. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/307867/Statutory_Guidance_-_Missing_from_care__3_.pdf

Recommendation 5: Risk assessment

Statutory agencies must ensure that all trafficked, unaccompanied and separated children receive thorough and ongoing risk assessment, both to inform care planning and to guide the response to missing incidents.

- i. Statutory agencies must ensure that potentially trafficked, unaccompanied and separated children receive a robust risk assessment at first encounter. Such risk assessments must acknowledge the child's risk of going missing. Risk assessments should be dynamic and shared appropriately between relevant agencies.
- ii. Police forces that encounter or receive missing person reports for trafficked, unaccompanied and separated children must ensure that these children's cases attract a high-risk assessment. As stated in the *Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care*: "Unaccompanied migrant or asylum-seeking children who go missing immediately after becoming looked after should be treated as potential victims of trafficking."¹⁵⁴
- iii. Statutory service providers must give due consideration to the ongoing risk faced by missing trafficked young people after the age of 18. Missing children should not automatically be re-categorised as 'wanted' without risk assessment.
- iv. Statutory service providers must treat all children suspected of or who have been trafficked as vulnerable children and prioritise this over any alleged criminal activity that may have been part of their exploitation. This includes not using the term 'absconder' or 'wanted' to describe them whilst missing.

4.3. Taking a coordinated approach

Out of area placements

Out of area placements are those where a child is moved from one local authority to a care placement in another area. There is mixed research about the use of out of area placements for children. Some research has shown it to be problematic if used without sufficient evidence of effectiveness or due care for planning, and when information is not shared between the responsible authority and the receiving authority.¹⁵⁵ However, other research suggests the most effective foster placements for sexually exploited children are out of the authority where they are forced to break links with those who exploited them.¹⁵⁶ Previous research has recommended that the Home Office and Department for Education should instigate research into relocation of vulnerable children.¹⁵⁷

This may, on the face of it, appear to be at odds with the need for national planning to effect distribution of unaccompanied children (including those who have been trafficked) between local authorities, through the National UASC Transfer Protocol. However, the challenges associated with out of area placements are not necessarily all applicable to a child who is being permanently relocated, as they will be living in their (new) home borough and should have full access to local support. Despite this, the recommendations for local authorities making out of area placements are also relevant for authorities arranging the transfer of trafficked and unaccompanied children. When moving a child to another area:

- Care should be taken to assess the risks of the areas and placements to which they are sent
- Information transfer to the host (new home) borough must be comprehensive and immediate

¹⁵⁵ Sturrock, R. and Holmes, L. (2015). *Running the Risks: The links between gang involvement and young people going missing. Catch 22 and Missing People*. Available at: <https://www.missingpeople.org.uk/runningtherisks>

¹⁵⁶ Farmer, E. & Pollock, S. (2003). *Managing sexually abused and/or abusing children in substitute care*.

¹⁵⁷ Sturrock, R. and Holmes, L. (2015). *Running the Risks: The links between gang involvement and young people going missing. Catch 22 and Missing People*. Available at: <https://www.missingpeople.org.uk/runningtherisks>

Supporting children when they are found – 'Return home interviews'

“There needs to be a prompt response to concerns raised so that the young person feels supported.

– Social worker

Although many trafficked and unaccompanied children who go missing remain unfound for long periods, many are subsequently located. For this group of children, it is vital that responsible agencies follow guidance on responding to returned missing children. The 2014 *Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care* states that: “When a child is found, they must be offered an independent return interview, [which provides] an opportunity to uncover information that can help protect children from the risk of going missing again, from risks they may have been exposed to while missing or from risk factors in their home.”¹⁵⁸

‘Return home interviews’ were identified by several respondents to our survey of professionals as an important way to gather intelligence from trafficked or unaccompanied children who have been missing. This group of children may be witnesses to the serious crime of child trafficking and modern slavery, making it even more important to provide effective and sensitive support to them on their return.

Provision of ‘return home interviews’ remains inconsistent nationally, and children placed out of area, in particular, may not always have access to an independent interview.¹⁵⁹ For children who are not proficient or confident in English, or who are still in fear of traffickers, providing good quality ‘return home interviews’ is more challenging and, yet, essential.

¹⁵⁸ Department for Education. (2014). *Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care*. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/307867/Statutory_Guidance_-_Missing_from_care__3_.pdf

¹⁵⁹ Missing People. (2014). “Return Interviews”.

GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE 4: TAKING A COORDINATED APPROACH

North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children Board's 'Vulnerable, Exploited, Missing and Trafficked' (VEMT) procedures and VEMT Practitioner Groups.

In June 2015, the North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children Board (NYSCB) approved the introduction of the VEMT (Vulnerable, Exploited, Missing, and Trafficked) procedures and VEMT Practitioner Groups (VPGs) to build on the existing CSE strategy. The VEMT procedure was launched in October 2015 across North Yorkshire, and four VPGs were established. The work is rooted in the local response to child sexual exploitation (CSE), and initially focussed only on CSE cases. The introduction of VEMT procedures was prompted by the NYSCB recognising the experience of the designated safeguarding children nurse and other colleagues, who recommended good practice from elsewhere.

The VPGs share information using a risk assessment tool, agree the risk level to the child and put in place multi-agency actions to address the risk. The VPG offers an opportunity for each agency's single point of contact (SPOC) to provide updates on issues arising from their locality and service, which informs the wider understanding of the local CSE picture. VPG SPOCs have a responsibility to identify where data can be improved to ensure the groups build the most accurate possible picture of key areas of VEMT work. Any agency with information relating to a young person's views or voice will also ensure this is shared and considered during the meetings.

Cases are not discharged from the groups until there is multi-agency agreement that risk is being managed. The VEMT work extends beyond the work of the VPGs, and has included the NYSCB facilitation of three multi-agency conferences on VEMT issues.

North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children Board's VEMT work involves all agencies that are part of the Safeguarding Board, led by Police and Children's Social Care, including:

- Police
- Children and Families Service
- Independent Residential Sector
- District Council
- Youth Justice Service

- Health
- Contraception and Sexual Health Services
- Third Sector
- Housing
- The Forces (appropriate to locality)
- Community Safety Partnership
- Safer Neighbourhood Team

The VPG provide quarterly reports to the Safeguarding Board's Practice Development Subgroup, which includes populating a dataset. Monthly findings are also shared across agencies.

Since October 2015, 35 VPG meetings have taken place. To date, the groups have identified 78 victims and/or potential victims of CSE, 29 actual or potential perpetrators and 7 concerning locations. As a result of these meetings, a one-minute guide to the NRM has been developed by the NYSCB and shared with colleagues; training has been updated to ensure that issues of trafficking are included in relation to CSE; information about the use of Child Abduction Warning Notices has been shared; pertinent information has been shared with other local authorities; children have received direct work addressing risk and improved information has been gathered about Out of Area Looked-After Children residing in North Yorkshire.

Plans are now underway to expand the VEMT work beyond CSE to other areas of vulnerability.

Recommendation 6: Improved data recording and reporting

Patterns and prevalence of trafficked, unaccompanied and separated children going missing from care must be monitored locally, regionally and nationally to inform resource allocation, risk management and effective response.

- i. Local Safeguarding Children Boards in England, the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland and Child Protection Committees in Scotland should compile reports – at least annually – to be shared with the Anti-Slavery Commissioner, Children's Commissioner and the Home Office. A nominated independent national body should compile and monitor the contents of these reports. Reports should cover:

- Numbers of trafficked, unaccompanied and separated children in their area (including data provided to the NRM)
- Numbers of trafficked, unaccompanied and separated children who went missing, and the outcomes
- Details of the coordinated response to trafficked, unaccompanied and separated in their area

ii. Police missing person systems should have the ability to record the following risks alongside other risk factors, such as CSE and gang involvement:

- Trafficked
- At risk of trafficking
- Unaccompanied asylum-seeking or separated child

iii. In order to allow adequate reporting of prevalence, patterns and trends, local authorities must ensure that each child's history or risk of trafficking are recorded on the authority's recording system, as well as on the child's individual care plan. This trafficking flag should be a reportable assessment factor allowing for analysis and monitoring.

iv. The government must commit to funding a national police database of missing people, prioritise its development and state when it will be available for use. The new database should include detailed information about missing children's vulnerabilities and risk indicators, including when they are identified as trafficked or at risk of trafficking.

v. The Home Office must ensure the National Referral Mechanism addresses the specific needs of potential child victims. It must embed the identification of trafficking/modern slavery risk processes in a localised, multi-agency

framework that prioritises a child protection response above any immigration or criminality issues. Any identification of trafficking/modern slavery must be linked to clear and sustainable specialist support and accommodation for children, based on individual need.

Recommendation 7: National, regional and local coordination

In order to understand and respond to changes in the local and regional patterns of trafficked, unaccompanied and separated children going missing from care, statutory and voluntary agencies must work together effectively.

i. Police forces must ensure there is a single point of contact (SPOC) for trafficking and separated children in force. This SPOC should work closely with Missing and CSE leads and others as appropriate, attend LSCBs and work with counterparts across their region.

ii. The Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner should appoint someone dedicated to children's issues to oversee the response nationally and to promote good practice.



**"I just wanted to feel
like I had a home."**

– Member of ECPAT UK youth group for young victims of trafficking

5 Conclusion and recommendations

This study has revealed that an alarming number of trafficked and unaccompanied children went missing from care in the UK in 2014/15, and many were not found. This is a child protection issue that requires urgent attention by national and local government, who must ensure they develop a robust response to the prevention of children going missing from their care.

Child victims of trafficking are especially vulnerable to going missing, with 28% having gone missing at least once in the period of this study. Thirteen per cent of unaccompanied children went missing during this time period. Our findings also tell us that trafficked and unaccompanied children are more likely to go missing for a longer period than other children, with around one third missing for more than a week, compared to 2% in national statistics.¹⁶⁰ In these particular cases, it is not possible to ascertain where these children went or why they went missing. However, previous learning from missing children who have found their way back to local authority care suggests serious cause for concern. For example: *“The trafficker still has control of the child and seeks to remove the child from the area as soon as possible;”* or *“The child has run away from fear of being identified by the trafficker (and) without financial resources or identity documents, the child will be at risk of further abuse and exploitation.”*¹⁶¹

¹⁶⁰ National Crime Agency Missing Persons Bureau. (2016). *Missing Persons Data Report 2015-16*. Available at: <http://missingpersons.police.uk/en/resources/missing-persons-data-report-2015-16>

¹⁶¹ ECPAT UK. (2007). *Missing Out*. Available at: http://www.ecpat.org.uk/sites/default/files/missing_out_2007.pdf

¹⁶² Ofsted, Care Quality Commission, HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and HM Inspectorate of Probation. (2016). *‘Time to listen’ – a joined up response to child sexual exploitation and missing children*. <http://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmic/publications/response-to-child-sexual-exploitation-and-missing-children/>

It is highly likely that the number of children going missing across the UK is larger than this research suggests, as not all local authorities were able to provide data for the specified time period. In particular, we believe that the number of trafficked children going missing from care in our data (28%) is significantly lower than the true percentage, due to widespread failure to identify and record trafficking across local authorities. Even in areas known to be hubs of human trafficking, such as London, whole boroughs had not identified a single case of child exploitation in a year-long period. The case management systems used by local authorities frequently lacked a ‘flag’ or marker to record trafficking that could be used to monitor trends and information to effectively analyse, plan and evaluate safeguarding responses.

The need for robust local data is paramount. A recent Ofsted joint inspection into child sexual exploitation and missing children stated: *“The starting point for local areas in tackling child sexual exploitation has to be developing an accurate picture of child sexual exploitation in their locality. Understanding the cohort of children at risk is essential in enabling agencies to target services to meet local need and develop preventative approaches that encompass the risks that children face in that area.”*¹⁶²

As a result both of the data collection and data analysis for this project, we make three sets of recommendations: creating a culture of trust; responding to risk; and taking a coordinated approach.

Too often, oversight and monitoring of child trafficking has been shown to be ‘absent’ at a local level. This, coupled with a lack of an official national database for missing children, means it is impossible to gauge the true picture of child trafficking in the UK. This is despite statutory guidance that places clear responsibilities on local authorities for the reporting and monitoring of trafficked children and children who go missing from home or care.

It has been difficult to gain an accurate picture of the number of vulnerable children who have gone missing because of the inability of local authorities to report to this level of detail. In areas where this was not possible, it points to a worrying lack of visibility of issues relating to trafficking and young people going missing. This study has explored some key links between trafficked and unaccompanied children going missing. Other research has highlighted that the age of a child determines the support that they are entitled to, with children under 16 years old normally placed in foster care, and 16-17 year-olds usually placed in cheaper semi-independent or independent living arrangements.¹⁶⁴ Further research in this area would be beneficial to identify any correlation with age, type of placement and the risk of going missing.”

The Council of Europe’s Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA) recently criticised the UK’s response to child trafficking, expressing concerns that “*a significant number of unaccompanied children placed in local authority care went missing*”¹⁶⁵. It urged UK authorities “*to take steps to improve the identification of child victims of trafficking, and to ensure that all unaccompanied minors who are possible victims of trafficking are assigned a legal guardian and are provided with suitable safe accommodation and adequately trained supervisors or foster parents*”¹⁶⁶.

It is vital that relevant agencies take practical steps to improve the approach to recording and

monitoring of trafficking and missing concerns for children in care. This is particularly relevant for placement planning and risk assessments. However, this study also emphasises, through its consultations with young people who have been trafficked, the need to listen to the views of children themselves in order to establish a culture of trust where professionals in contact with trafficked, unaccompanied and separated children recognise and understand their particular vulnerabilities.

Children going missing is a complex issue with no one single method for prevention. Our survey of professionals revealed a variance in views about the best approaches to prevention of young people going missing. Police officers indicated support for practical interventions, such as taking biometric data from young people on first contact, which could be used to identify children if they go missing and are subsequently found. Local authority respondents rated training and the provision of specialist foster care placements and peer support most highly. The young people prioritised trained, knowledgeable carers and having independent advocates or guardians as key interventions.

The training of professionals and carers in contact with trafficked, separated and unaccompanied children was strongly supported by the young people during the workshops, who recognised how it would help providers to have a greater understanding of their needs, and also for the professionals responding to the survey, many of whom indicated gaps in their own knowledge around the issues explored in this report. The ability to identify trafficking indicators is key to being able to keep a child safe from harm. If early identification of risk does not occur, children may go missing and be re-trafficked, and the opportunity to safeguard them may never arise again. Examples given to this study have shown that this can become a cycle of abuse for many child victims of trafficking, often lasting many years into adulthood.

¹⁶⁴ Humphris R. and Signa N. (2016). *Becoming Adult: Mapping unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in England*. Available at: <https://becominadultproject.files.wordpress.com/2016/07/research-brief-series-01-2016.pdf>

¹⁶⁵ GRETA Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings. (2016). *5th General Report on Activities*. Available at: http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/trafficking/Docs/Gen_Report/GRETA_2016_1_Web_en.pdf

¹⁶⁶ Ibid

5.1 Creating a culture of trust

Recommendation 1: Child-specific training for professionals and carers

In order to address the lack of awareness of the issues and risks faced by trafficked, unaccompanied and separated children, and to ensure that care providers understand and respond to the needs of children effectively, frontline professionals working with such children must be trained to an appropriate level. This research noted that much of the human trafficking training on offer across the UK pays little or no regard to the necessary child protection response required in child cases.

- i) Police forces and local authorities must provide police staff and officers, and social workers with mandatory training covering, but not limited to, the following topics:
 - Definition and nature of trafficking, exploitation and modern slavery in the UK
 - Identifying and safeguarding trafficked, unaccompanied and separated children
 - Child protection
 - Risks faced by children and young adults
 - Balancing risks and rights
 - Care planning and risk assessment
 - Responding to suspected or potential trafficking
 - Using the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) and available legislation
- ii. Local authorities must provide foster carers and professionals who work with trafficked, unaccompanied and separated children with appropriate, quality and regular face-to-face training.
- iii. All training must aim to break down the culture of disbelief, must encourage anyone in contact with trafficked, unaccompanied and separated children to recognise and understand their vulnerability, and must promote a culture of trust.

Recommendation 2: Building a culture of trust with trafficked, unaccompanied and separated children

In order to build trust with trafficked, unaccompanied and separated children, to prevent them going missing, all agencies providing support must ensure that a child's first and subsequent encounters with services are supportive, and that next steps are clearly explained.

- i. On their first encounter with statutory services all trafficked, unaccompanied and separated children must be treated with respect, and their accounts given credence. Staff members who are likely to encounter this group of children must receive appropriate training as stated in Recommendation 1.
- ii. Service providers should make available peer support from children and young people with similar experiences; this could be face to face, in facilitated groups or through written or audio-visual media. An example of this would be short films explaining processes and risks, in a range of languages, featuring previously trafficked children.
- iii. Service providers and carers must provide children with accessible information about how they can get help if they go missing, and at other points in their journey. This should include local services and Missing People's national, 24/7 free and confidential Runaway Helpline, available by phone and text to 116000.
- iv. Trafficked, unaccompanied and separated children should be accommodated within a supportive environment where they have access to culturally appropriate services, occupation (education or training), food, language, religious practice and compassionate care.

Recommendation 3: Independent Child Trafficking Advocates/Guardians

In order to protect the rights and promote the wellbeing of trafficked, unaccompanied and separated children, the Government should urgently introduce a consistent, effective national system of legal, independent guardianship for all of these children across the UK, regardless of nationality. This system should be available until a young person is at least 21 years of age.

5.2 Responding to risk

Recommendation 4: Safe and appropriate accommodation

All trafficked, unaccompanied and separated children must be accommodated in appropriate placements in order to build trust, promote wellbeing and prevent missing incidents.

i. The views and voices of trafficked, unaccompanied and separated children must be taken into account by local authorities when planning placements.

ii. Trafficked, unaccompanied and separated children must be placed in safe and appropriate environments, such as with trained foster carers or other specialist provision.

iii. There must be adequate provision in the area to meet local need. Accommodation must have trained staff or foster carers, and timely provision of support to meet individual children's needs.

iv. The Government must publish detailed plans and a timetable for an independent review of local authority support (including accommodation) for trafficked children. The review that has already been announced¹⁶⁵ should be expanded to encompass support for

unaccompanied children, trafficked children from outside the European economic area and trafficked British nationals. The Government must urgently act upon the findings of the review to ensure adequate resourcing and provision of specialist support for those at risk of trafficking.

Recommendation 5: Risk assessment

Statutory agencies must ensure that all trafficked, unaccompanied and separated children receive thorough and ongoing risk assessment, both to inform care planning and to guide the response to missing incidents.

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ii. Police forces that encounter, or receive missing person reports for, trafficked, unaccompanied and separated children must ensure that these children's cases attract a high-risk assessment. As stated in the *Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care*: "Unaccompanied migrant or asylum-seeking children who go missing immediately after becoming looked after should be treated as potential victims of trafficking."

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iv. Statutory service providers must treat all children suspected of trafficking or who have been trafficked as vulnerable children and prioritise this over any alleged criminal activity that may have been part of their exploitation. This includes not using the term 'absconder' or 'wanted' whilst they are missing.

¹⁶⁵ House of Commons Hansard. (28 June 2016). "Independent Advocates for Trafficked Children". Available at: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2016-06-28/debates/16062854000001/IndependentAdvocatesForTraffickedChildren>

5.3. Taking a coordinated approach

Recommendation 6: Improved data recording and reporting

Patterns and prevalence of trafficked, unaccompanied and separated children going missing from care must be monitored locally, regionally and nationally to inform resource allocation, risk management and effective response.

i. Local Safeguarding Children Boards in England, the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland and Child Protection Committees in Scotland should compile reports – at least annually – to be shared with the Anti-Slavery Commissioner, Children’s Commissioner and the Home Office. A nominated independent national body should compile and monitor the contents of these reports. Reports should cover:

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- Numbers of trafficked, unaccompanied and separated children who went missing, and the outcomes
- Details of the coordinated response to trafficked, unaccompanied and separated children in their area

ii. Police missing person systems should have the ability to record the following risks alongside other risk factors, such as CSE and gang-involvement:

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- At risk of trafficking
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iii. In order to allow adequate reporting of prevalence, patterns and trends, local authorities must ensure that each child’s history or risk of trafficking are recorded on

the authority’s recording system, as well as on the child’s individual care plan. This trafficking flag should be a reportable assessment factor allowing for analysis and monitoring.

iv. The government must commit to funding a national police database of missing people, prioritise its development and state when it will be available for use. The new database should include detailed information about missing children’s vulnerabilities and risk indicators, including when they are identified as trafficked or at risk of trafficking.

v. The Home Office must ensure the National Referral Mechanism addresses the specific needs of potential child victims. It must embed the identification of trafficking/modern slavery risk process in a localised, multi-agency framework that prioritises a child protection response above any immigration or criminality issues. Any identification of trafficking/modern slavery must be linked to clear and sustainable specialist support and accommodation for children, based on individual need.

Recommendation 7: National, regional and local coordination

In order to understand and respond to changes in the local and regional patterns of trafficked, unaccompanied and separated children going missing from care, statutory and voluntary agencies must work together effectively.

i. Police forces must ensure there is a single point of contact (SPOC) for trafficking and separated children in force. This SPOC should work closely with Missing and CSE leads and others as appropriate, attend LSCBs, and work with counterparts across their region.

ii. The Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner should appoint someone dedicated to children’s issues to oversee the response nationally and to promote good practice.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

ECPAT UK Freedom of Information Request

I am writing to make an open government request for all the information to which I am entitled under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

The Care Planning and Care Leavers (Amendment) Regulations 2014 require a child's care plan to record whether a child is a victim, or there is reason to believe they may be a victim, of trafficking in human beings or is an unaccompanied asylum seeking child.

Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care (January 2014) requires data for children missing or away from placement without authorisation to be reported to the Department for Education by the responsible authority.

In this context please release the following information relating to looked after children in your authority for the period 1 September 2014 to 1 September 2015:

1. The total number of looked after children in the care of your authority that have been:
 - a. Identified as having been trafficked – including, but not limited to those identified through the National Referral Mechanism.
 - b. Suspected of having been trafficked, if not included in a.
 - c. Identified as an unaccompanied asylum seeking child (UASC) or a separated child.¹⁶⁶
2. The total number of looked after children in the care of your authority:
 - a. identified or suspected as having been trafficked and that have gone missing or absent.
 - b. identified as an UASC or separated child and that have gone missing or absent.

¹⁶⁶ "Separated children" are children, as defined in article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, who have been separated from both parents, or from their previous legal or customary primary caregiver, but not necessarily from other relatives. These may, therefore, include children accompanied by other adult family members.

3. The total number of individual incidents (which could involve the same child on more than one occasion) of looked after children in the care of your authority
 - a. identified or suspected as having been trafficked and that have gone missing or absent.
 - b. identified as an UASC or separated child and that have gone missing or absent.
4. The total number of looked after children in the care of your authority that are 'still missing' or absent (including those that subsequently turned 18 without being found) that were identified or suspected as having been trafficked or identified as an UASC or separated child.
5. For all of the above please provide a breakdown of these numbers by gender and nationality. *If identification is a concern due to small numbers involved please give the total figures and specify whether the child is British / EU / non EU . For Q3 & Q4 please add the length of time the child was missing during each incident.*

Appendix 2

ECPAT UK Survey Questions

1. In your current role do you see any relationship between a trafficked child's nationality and the likelihood of them going missing / how long they go missing for / or if they are found or return after being missing?
2. Please explain your answer as to whether a trafficked child's nationality is related to the likelihood of missing / duration / if they are found or return
3. In your current role do you see any relationship between a UASC / separated child's nationality and the likelihood of them going missing / how long they go missing for / or if they are found or return after being missing?
4. Please explain your answer as to whether a UASC / separated child's nationality is related to the likelihood of missing / duration / if they are found or return
5. In your experience, are British nationals recorded as trafficked children?
6. Can you comment further on the circumstances in which British children are more likely to be recorded as trafficked?
7. From your experience, can you identify particular reasons why trafficked or UASC / separated children may go missing from the locations you mentioned?
8. In your experience, does being criminalised (for example, arrested / prosecuted) have an impact on trafficked children going missing?
9. If being criminalised affects trafficked children going missing, please explain why
10. Does gender have an impact on the likelihood of a child going missing?
11. If gender affects the likelihood of a child going missing, please explain your answer
12. In your experience, is there a link between repeat missing episodes and child trafficking?
13. Please explain your answer as to whether there is a link between repeat missing and child trafficking
14. In your experience why do trafficked children go missing? Please rate the answers according to how often you feel they are factors in cases of children going missing and/or specify other reasons.
 - Not identified as trafficked so inadequate protection measures
 - Re-trafficking
 - Still under traffickers' control
 - Debt bondage
 - Asylum/immigration concerns
 - Child's account of exploitation not believed
 - Child's concern around age assessment process
 - Fear of potential/ongoing criminalisation
 - On release from immigration detention
 - On release from custody or prison
 - No/poor protection measures in place
 - Lack of specialist support
 - Lack of independent advocacy / guardianship
 - Unsuitable care placement / problems at home
 - Family reunification
 - Personal problems (e.g. unhappy, depressed, suicidal)
 - Problems at school (e.g. bullying, peer pressure)
 - Forced to leave/thrown out
 - Other (please specify)
15. In your experience why do UASC / separated children go missing? Please rate the answers below according to how often you feel they are factors in cases of children going missing and/or specify other reasons
 - Not identified as trafficked so inadequate
 - Asylum / Immigration concerns
 - Child's account of exploitation not believed
 - Child's concern around age assessment process
 - Fear of potential / ongoing criminalisation

- On release from immigration detention
 - On release from custody or prison
 - No / poor protection measures in place
 - Lack of specialist support
 - Lack of independent advocacy / guardianship
 - Unsuitable care placement / problems at home
 - Family reunification
 - Personal problems (e.g. unhappy, depressed, suicidal)
 - Problems at school (e.g. bullying, peer pressure)
 - Forced to leave / thrown out
 - Other (please specify)
16. On a scale from 1 (you strongly disagree) to 5 (you strongly agree) please rate the following statement: There are robust multi-agency arrangements to safeguard trafficked or unaccompanied missing children in my place of work
 17. On a scale from 1 (you strongly disagree) to 5 (you strongly agree) please rate the following statement: There is a clear process for difference agencies to share data about missing children with my place of work
 18. On a scale from 1 (you strongly disagree) to 5 (you strongly agree) please rate the following statement: My organisation provides sufficient training and knowledge around trafficking and missing risks
 19. On a scale from 1 (you strongly disagree) to 5 (you strongly agree) please rate the following statement: All unaccompanied children that go permanently missing should be presumed to have been trafficked
 20. Please expand on your answers if you can
 21. In your experience, are all child potential victims of trafficking encountered by your organisation / agency referred into the National Referral Mechanism (NRM)?
 22. If all child potential victims of trafficking encountered by your organisation / agency ARE NOT referred into the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), can you explain why?
 23. In your opinion, what role does the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) play in assessing and reducing the risk of missing?
 24. Does the police force in your area use the 'absent' definition for trafficked children reported as missing? (The police definition of 'absent' is a person not at a place where they are expected or required to be)
 25. In your experience is there a multi-agency risk assessment for trafficked children who go missing from care?
 26. In your experience is there a multi-agency risk assessment for UASC / separated children who go missing from care?
 27. 27. In your experience what risk category is usually used in cases of missing child potential victims of trafficking?
 28. 28. Please provide any additional comments you may have about the NRM, use of absent, multi-agency risk assessment, and the risk assessment level
 29. Are trafficked children involved in safety planning?
 30. If trafficked children ARE involved in safety planning, please specify how below
 31. Are UASC / separated children involved in safety planning?
 32. If UASC / separated children ARE involved in safety planning, please specify how
 33. Is there a clear process for recording trafficking concerns for young people in your place of work?
 34. Please explain your answer as to whether there is a clear process for recording trafficking concerns for young people in your place of work
 35. Do agencies share information when trafficked child goes missing?
 36. Do agencies share information when an UASC / separated child goes missing?
 37. Do you think the local community can play a role in reducing missing episodes for trafficked children?
 38. Please expand on your answer as to whether the local community can play a role in reducing missing episodes for trafficked children
 39. Have you come across cases of potentially trafficked children being criminalised (due to forced criminality or immigration issues) who then go

- missing?
40. If you HAVE come across potentially trafficked children being criminalised, please expand on your answer
 41. In your experience are children who have been criminalised treated differently when they go missing (for example classed as absconders)?
 42. If you've experienced criminalised children being treated differently when missing, how?
 43. Does a child going missing have an impact on any potential investigation into their traffickers?
 44. If a child going missing DOES have an impact onto investigation into their traffickers, please expand on how
 45. On a scale from 1 (completely ineffective) to 5 (very effective) please rate the following as a measures to prevent trafficked young people going missing:
 - Specialist foster care placement
 - Other specialist placement
 - Secure accommodation
 - 24 hour supervision whenever a child leaves their care setting for the first 4 - 12 weeks in care
 - Ensuring the child's room does not allow for easy exit, for example, is on an upper floor
 - CCTV on premises
 - Keeping location of placement confidential
 - Out of area placement
 - Restricted access to mobile phone/internet
 - Encouraging child to memorise a phone number for the local authority or carer
 - Child trafficking advocate / guardian
 - Training given to previously trafficked children so that they can talk to trafficked children newly taken
 - General peer support
 - Providing information (in relevant language) to young person about risks
 - Providing information on their rights as victims of trafficking
 - Taking photograph of young person on first contact
 - Taking biometric data on first contact
 - 'Return home interview'
 - Training of professionals working with the child
 - Other (please rate here and specify below)
 46. Please explain why you think your highest rated measure/s to prevent trafficked children from going missing is/are the most effective
 47. Please cite any best practice examples you are aware of to prevent trafficked or UASC / separated children from going missing

Appendix 3

Freedom of Information data (FOI)

Overall figures

Category	Children identified/suspected as trafficked	Unaccompanied children
Number	590	4,744
Number missing or absent	167	593
% missing or absent	28.3	12.5

Children identified/suspected as trafficked

Category	Children identified/suspected as trafficked
Total number of children identified/suspected as trafficked	590
Number of authorities having no such children	106
Number of authorities providing no information	43
Average number per authority for authorities having children identified/suspected as trafficked	8
Number of authorities having only one child identified/suspected as trafficked	14
Maximum number of children per authority for authorities having children identified/suspected as trafficked	58

Regional breakdown of numbers of children in selected categories

REGION	Numbers of children identified/suspected as trafficked	Children identified/suspected as trafficked %	Numbers of unaccompanied children	Unaccompanied children %
East Anglia	88	14.9	436	9.3
East Midlands	70	11.9	235	5.0
London	177	30.0	1,973	41.6
North	9	1.5	82	1.7
North East	23	3.9	19	0.4
Northern Ireland	13	2.2	20	0.4
North West	26	4.4	85	1.8
Scotland	48	8.1	150	3.2
South East	69	11.7	1,361	28.9
South West	12	2.0	64	1.4
Wales	14	2.4	57	1.2
West Midlands	41	6.9	262	5.6
Total	590	100	4744	100

10 highest ranked local authorities by number of children identified/suspected as trafficked

Ranking	Local authority	Number of children identified/suspected as trafficked
1	Thurrock	58
2	Northamptonshire	42
3	Redbridge	41
4	Glasgow City	39
5	Hillingdon	37
6	Kent County Council	31
7	Croydon	31
8	Lincolnshire	16
9	Hampshire	14
10	Bexley	13

Children identified as trafficked: 10 most commonly recorded nationalities

10 most common nationalities (where information given)	Male	Female	Gender Not Given	Total
Vietnamese	0	1	22	23
British	3	10	7	20
Romanian	5	12	0	17
Non-EU	4	5	7	16
Albanian	1	0	3	4
Eritrean	1	0	3	4
Polish	2	2	0	4
African	0	1	1	2
Egyptian	0	0	2	2
Somalian	0	1	1	2

Children suspected as trafficked: 10 most commonly recorded nationalities

10 most common nationalities (where information given)	Male	Female	Gender Not Given	Total
British	6	10	0	16
Vietnamese	4	5	0	9
Afghan	6	1	0	7
Non-EU	2	0	5	7
Albanian	2	2	0	4
Chinese	2	1	0	3
Nigerian	0	3	0	3
African	2	0	0	2
Bangladeshi	0	1	0	1
Bulgarian	0	1	0	1

Unaccompanied children: 10 most commonly recorded nationalities

10 most common nationalities (where information given)	Male	Female	Gender Not Given	Total
Albanian	383	24	59	466
Afghan	226	4	38	268
Non-EU	57	5	152	214
Eritrean	84	30	12	126
Vietnamese	34	17	9	60
Iranian	39	10	1	50
Syrian	36	4	0	40
African	20	11	0	31
Sudanese	29	1	1	31
Somalian	12	13	0	25

Children identified/suspected as trafficked who went missing or 'absent'

Category	Children identified/suspected as trafficked who went missing or 'absent'
Total number of children identified/suspected as trafficked who went missing or 'absent'	167
Number of authorities having children identified/suspected as trafficked who went missing or 'absent'	39
Number of authorities having no children identified/suspected as trafficked who went missing or 'absent'	141
Number of authorities providing no information	43
Average number per authority for authorities having children identified/suspected as trafficked who went missing or 'absent'	4
Number of authorities having only one child identified/suspected as trafficked who went missing or 'absent'	8
Maximum number of children per authority for authorities having children identified/suspected as trafficked who went missing or 'absent'	22

Unaccompanied children who went missing or 'absent'

Category	Unaccompanied children who went missing or 'absent'
Total number of unaccompanied children who went missing or 'absent'	593
Number of authorities having unaccompanied children who went missing or 'absent'	73
Unaccompanied children who went missing or 'absent'	120
Number of authorities providing no information	24
Average number per authority for authorities having unaccompanied children who went missing or 'absent'	8
Number of authorities having only one unaccompanied child who went missing	19
Maximum number per authority of children for authorities having unaccompanied children who went missing or 'absent'	190

Children who went missing or 'absent': Regional breakdown

REGION	Numbers of children identified/suspected as trafficked who went missing or 'absent'	Children identified/suspected as trafficked who went missing or 'absent' %	Numbers of unaccompanied children who went missing or 'absent'	Unaccompanied children who went missing or 'absent' %
East Anglia	21	12.6	54	9.1
East Midlands	18	10.8	23	3.9
London	43	25.7	197	33.2
North	5	3.0	11	1.9
North East	8	4.8	2	0.3
Northern Ireland	7	4.2	2	0.3
North West	6	3.6	5	0.8
Scotland	2	1.2	3	0.5
South East	31	18.6	256	43.2
South West	6	3.6	7	1.2
Wales	0	0.0	2	0.3
West Midlands	20	12.0	31	5.2
Total	167	100	593	100.0

Children identified/suspected as trafficked who went missing by nationality and gender

Nationality	Males	%	Females	%	Total	%
Albanian	1	3.8	1	3.6	2	3.7
British	1	3.8	9	32.1	10	18.5
Egyptian	1	3.8	0	0.0	1	1.9
Eritrean	1	3.8	0	0.0	1	1.9
Hungarian	0	0.0	1	3.6	1	1.9
Non-EU	0	0.0	1	3.6	1	1.9
Polish	1	3.8	0	0.0	1	1.9
Turkish	1	3.8	0	0.0	1	1.9
Vietnamese	12	46.2	0	0.0	12	22.2
Zimbabwean	0	0.0	1	3.6	1	1.9
No further information given	8	30.8	15	53.6	23	42.6
Total	26	100.0	28	100.0	54	100.0

Unaccompanied children who went missing by nationality and gender

Nationality	Males	%	Females	%	Total	%
African	4	1.1	1	3.6	5	1.3
Afghan	71	19.8	1	3.6	72	18.6
Albanian	82	22.8	2	7.1	84	21.7
Algerian	4	1.1	0	0.0	4	1.0
Chinese	1	0.3	0	0.0	1	0.3
Egyptian	25	7.0	0	0.0	25	6.5
Eritrean	38	10.6	3	10.7	41	10.6
Ethiopian	2	0.6	0	0.0	2	0.5
European	1	0.3	0	0.0	1	0.3
Indian	1	0.3	0	0.0	1	0.3
Iranian	4	1.1	2	7.1	6	1.6
Iraq	6	1.7	0	0.0	6	1.6
Kuwaiti	3	0.8	1	3.6	4	1.0
Lebanese	1	0.3	0	0.0	1	0.3
Middle Eastern	1	0.3	0	0.0	1	0.3
Moroccan	4	1.1	0	0.0	4	1.0
Non-EU	10	2.8	4	14.3	14	3.6
Pakistani	2	0.6	1	3.6	3	0.8
Sudanese	5	1.4	0	0.0	5	1.3
Syrian	26	7.2	1	3.6	27	7.0
Turkish	6	1.7	1	3.6	7	1.8
Vietnamese	36	10.0	9	32.1	45	11.6
No further information given	26	7.2	2	7.1	28	7.2
Total	359	100.0	28	100.0	387	100.0

Local authorities ranked by number of children identified/suspected as trafficked who went missing

Local authority (ranked by number of children identified/suspected as trafficked)	Number of children identified/ suspected as trafficked	% of children identified/suspected as trafficked who went missing
Thurrock	58	19.0
Hillingdon	37	59.5
Croydon	31	20
Kent County Council	31	67.7
Bexley	13	30.8
Manchester	13	15.4
Warwickshire	12	50.0
Suffolk	10	50.0
Belfast	9	77.8
Coventry	9	55.6
Solihull	9	22.2
Derbyshire	8	37.5
Newham	8	50.0
Enfield	4	25.0
Ealing	3	33.3
Warrington	3	66.6
West Lothian	3	33.3
Calderdale	2	100.0
Halton	2	100.0
Worcestershire	2	50.0
Gateshead	1	100.0
Average	12.8	52.5

Local authorities ranked by number of
unaccompanied children who went missing or 'absent'

Local authority (ranked by number of unaccompanied children)	Number of unaccompanied children	% of unaccompanied children who went missing or 'absent'
Kent County Council	985	19.3
Croydon	605	13.9
Hillingdon	216	8.3
Surrey	129	24.8
Newham	97	6.2
Hertfordshire	91	13.2
Milton Keynes	87	9.2
Harrow	85	2.4
Northamptonshire	85	16.5
Haringey	75	9.3
Suffolk	72	6.9
Warwickshire	72	16.7
Thurrock	71	15.5
Enfield	70	7.1
Solihull	63	3.2
Islington	60	11.7
Birmingham	53	5.7
Barking and Dagenham	49	10.2
Cambridgeshire	49	26.5
Barnet	44	6.8
Nottinghamshire	44	6.8
Waltham Forest	44	18.2
Brent	43	7.0
Hampshire	41	14.6
Bromley	40	15.0
Lincolnshire	40	5.0
Bexley	37	13.5
Hackney	30	2.7
Manchester	34	5.9
Redbridge	34	11.8
Lambeth	33	9.1
Buckinghamshire	32	3.1
Ealing	32	3.1
Merton	32	9.4
Tower Hamlets	31	3.2
Havering	28	14.3
Hammersmith and Fulham	27	7.4
Hounslow	27	7.4
Leeds	25	8.0
Luton	25	12.0
Leicestershire	24	8.3
Southwark	24	29.2
Coventry	23	26.1
East Sussex	23	39.1
Worcestershire	23	21.7
Central Bedfordshire	20	40.0
Slough	20	30.0
Kingston upon Thames	17	5.9
Liverpool	17	5.9
Wakefield	16	6.3
Belfast	15	13.3
Camden	14	7.1
Portsmouth	14	7.1
City of London	11	18.2

Derbyshire	11	18.2
Sutton	10	10.0
Newcastle upon Tyne	9	11.1
Norfolk	9	22.2
Salford	9	11.1
North Somerset	8	62.5
Oxfordshire	7	42.9
North Lincolnshire	6	83.3
Bath & N.E. Somerset	4	25.0
Edinburgh City	4	75.0
North East Lincolnshire	4	50.0
Rotherham	4	25.0
Cheshire West and Chester	3	33.3
Staffordshire	3	100.0
Swansea	2	50.0
Gateshead	1	100.0
Rhondda Cynon	1	100.0
Somerset	1	100.0

Number of children identified/ suspected as trafficked involved in missing incidents

Number of children identified/ suspected as trafficked involved in missing incidents	Number of children identified/ suspected as trafficked	Children identified/suspected as trafficked: missing incidents per child
331	139	2.4

Number of unaccompanied children involved in missing incidents

Number of unaccompanied children involved in missing incidents	Number of unaccompanied children	Unaccompanied children: missing incidents per child
994	410	2.4

Note: The number of children involved in missing incidents is lower than the number reported as missing overall. Local authorities who reported they looked after children suspected/identified as trafficked, or unaccompanied children who went missing, did not all provide information on the number of missing incidents.

Children identified/suspected as trafficked:
missing or 'absent' incidents per child
(rank order)

Local authority	Children identified/suspected as trafficked: missing or 'absent' incidents per child (rank order)
Lincolnshire	9
Belfast	7
Ealing	7
Bexley	4
Hillingdon	4
Derbyshire	3
Enfield	2
Lambeth	2
Kent County Council	2
Brighton and Hove	1
Gateshead	1
Halton	1
Hampshire	1
Manchester	1
Solihull	1
Suffolk	1
Thurrock	1
Warrington	1
Warwickshire	1
West Lothian	1
Worcestershire	1

Unaccompanied children: Missing or 'absent' incidents per child

Local authority	Unaccompanied children: Missing or 'absent' incidents per child
City of London	13
Croydon	7
Enfield	7
Redbridge	7
Thurrock	6
Bexley	6
Bromley	4
Belfast	3
Cheshire West and Chester	3
Derbyshire	3
North East Lincolnshire	3
Islington	3
Kingston upon Thames	2
Kensington & Chelsea	2
Kent County Council	2
Coventry	1
Brent	1
Lambeth	1
Staffordshire	1
Hillingdon	1
Waltham Forest	1
Bath and North East Somerset	1
Buckinghamshire	1
Cambridgeshire	1
Camden	1
Ealing	1

East Sussex	1
Gateshead	1
Hammersmith and Fulham	1
Harrow	1
Leicestershire	1
Liverpool	1
Manchester	1
Merton	1
Newcastle upon Tyne	1
Newham	1
Northamptonshire	1
Oxfordshire	1
Portsmouth	1
Rhondda Cynon	1
Rotherham	1
Salford	1
Slough	1
Solihull	1
Somerset	1
Suffolk	1
Sutton	1
Swansea	1
Tower Hamlets	1
Wakefield	1
Warwickshire	1
Worcestershire	1

Duration of missing incidents for children identified/suspected as trafficked

Duration of missing incidents for children identified/suspected as trafficked

	Number	%
Missing seven days or less	99	68
Missing more than seven days	47	32
Total	146	100

Duration of missing incidents for unaccompanied children

Duration of missing incidents for unaccompanied children

	Number	%
Missing seven days or less	356	68
Missing more than seven day	166	32
Total	522	100.0

Note: Not all local authorities reported on duration of missing incidents.

Children identified/suspected as trafficked or unaccompanied children: 'Still missing'

'Still missing' children	Children identified/suspected as trafficked or unaccompanied children
Number	207
Maximum	53
Average	5
Number of authorities having children 'still missing'	45

Children identified/suspected as trafficked or unaccompanied children 'still missing' by local authority (ranked)

Local authority	Children identified/suspected as trafficked or unaccompanied children 'still missing'
Kent County Council	53
Thurrock	12
Warwickshire	12
Cambridgeshire	9
East Sussex	8
Hillingdon	8
Southwark	8
Surrey	8
Haringey	6
Northamptonshire	6
Coventry	5
Worcestershire	5
Croydon	4
Hertfordshire	4
Islington	4
Lambeth	4
Birmingham	3
Newham	3
Slough	3
Suffolk	3
Waltham Forest	3
Bromley	2
Halton	2
Hampshire	2
Harrow	2
Lincolnshire	2
Merton	2
Milton Keynes	2
Norfolk	2
Nottingham	2
Oxfordshire	2
Wakefield	2
Warrington	2
Brent	1
Gateshead	1
Havering	1
Leicestershire	1
Newcastle upon Tyne	1
North East Lincolnshire	1
Richmond upon Thames	1
Solihull	1
Somerset	1
Swansea	1
Tower Hamlets	1
West Lothian	1



**missing
people**

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