Still in Harm's Way

An update report on trafficked and unaccompanied children going missing from care in the UK

ecpat UK

missing people

Contents

Foreword

> **I can see why young people run away to their trafficker. It is 'better the devil you know'.**

*– ECPAT UK youth group member
who was supported by the charity.*

"The most difficult thing to see is that I went through this experience 10 years ago and nothing has changed. Children and young people are still being trafficked, they are not believed by social workers and nothing is happening to these people…

"Now I can use my experience to help others see that things will be ok, they just have to get through it. But it makes me sad. We have already suffered so much and we are made to suffer again. We are told to trust the police and social workers, but they don't always help you. Some are good, but many think you are lying and that you are just trying to stay in the country.

"I remember in my situation I called the police for help. I was taken to the police station. I was so scared, I thought I was going to jail. I was very hungry and thirsty. No one offered me a drink. I was only 15 and they treated me like I was a criminal. I didn't know what I had done wrong.

"When I was taken to social services, my social worker said that they had spoken to my madam. They said that she told a different story and asked me to tell the truth. I just knew then that my trafficker was controlling them and there was no hope for me.

"My experience in social services and foster care was very difficult. I had some foster carers which were nice, but some I did not like. I had different social workers who told me different things and promised me things that did not happen. I did not know what was going to happen from one day to the next.

"In my head I thought I should go back to my madam. I was abused there, but I had managed to survive. Now I was so scared.

"I can see why young people run away to their trafficker. It is 'better the devil you know'.

I can see that some things are improving, but what is most important is that young people are made to feel safe. That is the most important thing."

ECPAT UK youth group member who was supported by the charity.

Executive summary

The scale of trafficked and unaccompanied children who go missing from care was first established in 2016, where it was found that child victims of trafficking and unaccompanied children were at high risk of going missing.[1]

This research attempts to update the existing data on this issue, which relates to 2014-15. This report quantifies the number of reported trafficked and unaccompanied children in the UK, as well as the number going missing from care.

Still in Harm's Way reveals that, in 2017:

- **910** children were reported by local authorities as identified or suspected victims of trafficking, an increase of 54% (up from 590) from 2014–15
- **4,963** children were reported as being unaccompanied, which is no significant change from 2014-15 (4,744 unaccompanied children)

High numbers of these children were reported missing in 2017:

- **27%** of all identified or suspected victims of trafficking went missing from care (244 of 910)
- **15%** of all unaccompanied children went missing from care (742 of 4,963)
- **169** children who have gone missing have not been found

The findings show that this severe child protection issue still requires urgent attention by national and local governments, with a focus on safeguarding children and preventing them from going missing. Investment is needed in robust safeguarding measures and the provision of specialist support for these children.

Child trafficking victims are particularly vulnerable to going missing, and are likely to go missing multiple times per year:

- In 2017 child trafficking victims went missing on average 7.2 times each. This is an increase from an average of 2.4 times in 2014-15.

The research has identified that for some local authorities, missing trafficked or unaccompanied children account for a significant proportion of their overall looked after children numbers:

- In one local authority, 15% of the total looked after children population were trafficked or unaccompanied children who had been reported missing.

This is concerning, and points to failures to properly safeguard and protect these children at a local level.

While the data indicates that there may have been improvements in the identification of child victims of trafficking over the last two years, it is evident that there is continued need for better data recording and reporting on the issue. This report provides the most up to date picture of the scale of trafficked and unaccompanied children going missing, however given the data limitations and the fact that the government does not collect comprehensive data on either of these issues, there remains no comprehensive understanding of the rate of child trafficking and missing in the UK.

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1 ECPAT UK and Missing People, 2016. Heading Back to Harm: a study on trafficked and unaccompanied children going missing from care in the UK. See: https://www.ecpat.org.uk/heading-back-to-harm-a-study-on-trafficked-and-unaccompanied-children-going-missing-from-care-in-the-uk.

Introduction

In 2016, ECPAT UK and Missing People published a ground-breaking report Heading Back to Harm: a study on trafficked and unaccompanied children going missing from care in the UK, with the aim of understanding more fully the scale of unaccompanied and trafficked children who go missing from the care system.[2] The research found that more than a quarter of all trafficked children and over one-tenth of all unaccompanied children went missing from care at least once in the year September 2014–15.

Trafficked and unaccompanied children were also found to go missing for longer periods than other missing children. Previous research has shown that just 2% of missing children are away for more than a week. Yet our research showed that around a third of trafficked and unaccompanied children went missing for longer than a week. At the time of data collection 207 of the missing children had not been found.

The research also identified a worrying lack of consistency in the way in which local authorities identified and recorded trafficking and exploitation. This important piece of research received a significant amount of interest amongst a wide range of practitioners and policy makers, as well as the wider public, and has been instrumental in shaping conversations and decision-making at the national level.

Recognising the need for more recent data on this issue, this report provides an update of the Heading Back to Harm report, using data from 2017 to analyse the same issues. The aim of this report is to continue to build understanding of the scale of unaccompanied and trafficked children who go missing from the care system in the UK.

Methodology

The research was conducted by the charities ECPAT UK and Missing People, in partnership with University College London (UCL).

The findings in this report are based on responses to Freedom of Information Requests (FOIs), sent under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, to 217 local authorities with responsibility for children's social care in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland.[3] The requests asked how many trafficked or unaccompanied children went missing from care in 2017. Questions were asked to gain the following information:

- Numbers of children in care 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'
- A breakdown of trafficked, separated and unaccompanied children by gender and nationality.

The full FOI request can be found in Appendix 3.[4] The data received was primarily quantitative.[5] Statutory agencies are obliged to collect and monitor the information sought through this research: for more detail on these obligations please see Appendix 2.

Gaps in existing data

Child trafficking

The 2016 Heading Back to Harm research was undertaken due to ECPAT UK and Missing People's concerns about the numbers of children who go missing, and the lack of centrally collected data on the numbers of unaccompanied children and child victims of trafficking who go missing from care. Two years on, this is still the case.

Identification of child victims of trafficking remains poor, despite efforts to improve the system for victim identification – the National Referral Mechanism (NRM). As well as the process for deciding if an individual is a victim of modern slavery and trafficking, the NRM is also the mechanism through which the National Crime Agency's Modern Slavery Human Trafficking Unit (MSHTU) collects data about victims.

There were 2,118 children referred into the NRM in 2017; a rise of 66% on the previous year. Furthermore, children comprised a total of 41% of all referrals into the NRM. However, the actual number of trafficked children is likely to be far higher, with UK estimates of the number of victims significantly larger. The Walk Foundation estimates that there are 136,000 victims of modern slavery in the UK, and the UK Government estimates this figure to be 13,000.[6] Despite these increased figures, awareness of child trafficking and the NRM amongst frontline professionals remains low.[7] The NRM data is therefore extremely limited. There are also huge problems with the way in which the NRM collects data. The way the data is presented is constantly changing. Finally, there is

no comprehensive local or regional breakdown of the data to improve understanding of scale and trends (although it is possible to see who made the referral, i.e. which police force, local authority or NGO).

The Department for Education does not collate or publish nationwide data on child trafficking. Local authorities, who have a statutory duty to support child victims of trafficking, do not have a standardised model of collecting data on these children. As our original research found, many local authorities struggled to respond to our FOI requests and provide the relevant data. There were a wide variety of methods of recording data, and often no system in place at all to record this information.

Missing children

The data published by the National Crime Agency, supplemented by data provided by Police Scotland and Police Service of Northern Ireland, based on data returns from UK police forces, shows that 80,000 children are reported missing each year in over 210,000 incidents.[8]

It is likely that these figures are a significant underestimate as they are purely based on police data. There are limitations to the data itself, including differing recording practices across police forces and incomplete data. Some people are not reported missing to the police at all, so will not be included in police statistics. There are also limitations to the police systems for identifying multiple concerns, e.g. when a missing child is also known to be at risk of exploitation or trafficking.

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[2] ECPAT UK and Missing People, 2016. Heading Back to Harm: a study on trafficked and unaccompanied children going missing from care in the UK. See: https://www.ecpat.org.uk/heading-back-to-harm-a-study-on-trafficked-and-unaccompanied-children-going-missing-from-care-in-the-uk.

[3] The equivalent provision in Scotland is the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002.

[4] The FOI requested data relating to looked after children in the care of the local authority for the period of 1 January 2017 to 31 December 2017, however some local authorities were not able to provide data for this exact time period so provided data for the financial year 2017–18.

[5] For qualitative information about the links between missing and trafficked and unaccompanied children, please see the 2016 Heading Back to Harm report. A number of local authorities made a partial response to the FOI request, citing Section 40 of the Freedom of Information Act, which in effect prohibits the release of information that might bring about the identification of particular individuals. In most cases, concerns about identification of children arose because the number of children in the relevant category was small. In these cases, rather than giving a specific number, local authorities indicated that the numbers involved were less than 'x' (x was typically 5 or 10). In the analysis of the data, we allocated a random number between 1 and x in these cases.

[6] Walk Free Foundation, 2018. Global Slavery Index. See: https://www.globalslaveryindex.org/2018/findings/country-studies/united-kingdom/. Home Office, 2014. Modern Slavery Strategy. See: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/383764/Modern_Slavery_Strategy_FINAL_DEC2015.pdf.

[7] ECPAT UK, Time to Transform, 2017. See: www.ecpat.org.uk/time-to-transform; Home Office, 2014. Review of the National Referral Mechanism for victims of human trafficking. See: https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20141202113228/https://nrm.homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/2014/11/nrm-final-report.pdf

[8] See: https://www.missingpeople.org.uk/about-us/about-the-issue/research/76-keyinformation2.html?showall=&start=0

The Department for Education publishes annual statistics on children going missing from care in England, based on local authority end of year returns.[9] In 2017–18, over 11% of looked after children in England were reported missing on at least one occasion.[10] Children in care are significantly more likely to be reported missing than those not in care, with over 1 in 10 going missing compared to 1 in 200 of those not in care. Looked after children are also more likely to go missing repeatedly. In 2017–18, looked after children who were reported missing had an average of 6 missing incidents, compared to 2.6 missing incidents for children who are not in care.

There have been discussions around the development of a national missing person's register, but this has not yet been established. A 2012 joint Inquiry by the APPG for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults and the APPG for Looked-After Children and Care Leavers recommended the creation of a comprehensive and independent national system of data collection on trafficked children who go missing.[11]

Trafficked and unaccompanied children going missing

With the publication of *Heading Back to Harm* in 2016, the high likelihood of trafficked and unaccompanied children going missing was clearly demonstrated. We found that the key risk factors for trafficked and unaccompanied children going missing were:

- Not being identified by professionals as a potential victim of trafficking

- Control or influence of traffickers on the children

- Inappropriate accommodation placements and other protection measures

- Children's lack of trust and connection with carers and other professionals, or professionals not being adequately trained to understand children's experiences and needs

- Lack of consistent support from a trusted/ specialist individual

- Children feeling isolated and not engaging with school and social networks

- Uncertain immigration status and concerns around this, fear of not being believed and potentially being removed from the UK, as well as stressful procedures such as age assessments and official interviews

- Being criminalised, for example being arrested or prosecuted

However, since the publication of *Heading Back to Harm*, there has been limited new data and understanding of the issue. Media reporting has raised some awareness; an investigation by The Times found that 150 Vietnamese children disappeared from care and foster homes between 2015 and October 2017.[12] The increased awareness of child criminal exploitation, especially in 'county lines'[13] situations has resulted in some agencies recording information about this type of exploitation and its links with missing episodes, however this is not consistent and there is no centralised collection of this data.

The UK Government collects data on the numbers of unaccompanied children seeking asylum in care (4,690 in 2017), but not on their rates of going missing. There is no specific data on unaccompanied children going missing in the UK, other than that provided by *Heading Back to Harm*. However, there have been increasing concerns about children in migration across Europe going missing. A report by Europol estimated there are as many as 10,000 children who have gone missing since arriving in Europe, with many feared to have been exploited by organised crime groups.[14] Specific data on the numbers of children who have gone missing in the UK since arriving from Calais has also highlighted failures to safeguard and protect these highly vulnerable children.[15]

9 Department for Education, 2018. Children looked after in England including adoption: 2017 to 2018. See: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2017-to-2018.

10 There were 104,100 looked after children in England. 11,530 were reported missing at least once. This is a significant increase on the figures provided in 2014-15, where just over 6% of looked after children were reported missing (6,140 of 99,410 looked after children).

11 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. See: https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/tcs/u32/ joint_appg_inquiry_-_report...pdf.

12 The Times, 'Child trafficking victims vanish from council care and into the hands of criminals', 13 October 2017. See: www.thetimes.co.uk/ article/child-trafficking-victims-vanish-from-council-care-and-into-the-hands-of-criminals-baroness-butler-sloss-rochdale-gctdcqgg6.

13 A police term used to refer to situations in which young people may be exploited to facilitate the transportation and sale of drugs from major cities into smaller towns and rural areas.

14 BBC News, 'Migrant crisis: More than 10,000 children 'missing,' 31st January 2016. See: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-35453589.

15 May Bulman, 'More than 100 child refugees missing in UK after being smuggled from Calais. The Independent, 22nd July 2017. See: https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/child-refugees-uk-missing-calais-smuggled-jungle-camp-crisis-lorries-parliament-dubs-resettlement-a7853991.html.

Findings

Overall picture

Numbers identified

910

Children identified or suspected as victims of trafficking

4,963

Unaccompanied children

There were 910 children identified or suspected as victims of trafficking by local authorities in the UK in 2017; a 54% increase from the 2014-15 figure (590 children). It is not possible to determine the cause of this significant increase, but it is likely to be at least in part due to improved identification and recording practices.

There were 4,963 unaccompanied children recorded overall, which means there is no significant change since the 2014-15 data, where 4,744 children were recorded as unaccompanied.

In total, 5,873 unaccompanied and trafficked children were reported as being in local authority care in 2017, a 10% increase on 2014-15 (5,345 children).

16 Please note that where local authorities responded with 'less than' figures, a number was randomly selected and used for analysis of overall statistics.

Trafficked and unaccompanied children missing from care

986

(17%) unaccompanied and trafficked children reported missing

244

(27%) trafficked children reported missing

742

(15%) unaccompanied children reported missing

Of the 5,873 unaccompanied and trafficked children in local authority care, 17% (986) were reported missing at least once in 2017.

Child victims of trafficking were more likely to be reported missing than unaccompanied children, with 27% (244) of all trafficked children being reported missing at least once. The percentage of unaccompanied children going missing was lower, With 15% (742) being reported missing in 2017.

These figures are much higher than missing children in the general population, where 1 in 200 children go missing, compared to the 1 in 10 looked after children reported missing each year. Over 1 in 4 trafficked children and 1 in 6-7 unaccompanied children were reported as missing in 2017.

The 244 trafficked children who went missing were spread over 66 local authorities, with the highest number of children going missing in one authority reported as 39 (double the highest figure in 2015). These 39 children comprised 86% of the total (45) trafficked children in the care of that local authority, meaning that less than 15% were not reported missing in 2017.

The 742 unaccompanied children who went missing did so from 92 local authorities, with the highest number missing from a single local authority being 257.

These figures are largely similar to the data collected in 2014-15, with a very slight decrease in the percentage of trafficked children going missing and a slight increase in the percentage of unaccompanied children going missing. In 2014-15:

- 28% of trafficked children were reported missing (167 of 590), compared to 27% in 2017 (244 of 910)

- 13% of unaccompanied children were reported missing (593 of 4,744), compared to 15% in 2017 (742 of 4,963)

For some local authorities, almost all trafficked or unaccompanied children in their care were reported missing at least once. Nine local authorities reported that 50% or more had been reported missing.

Still missing

169
trafficked and unaccompanied children still missing

Shockingly, almost 20% (169) of the total number of trafficked and unaccompanied children who were reported missing had not been found at the time of data collection. There are no directly comparable national figures, but national statistics show that only 2% of all missing children will be missing for longer than a week.

29 local authorities reported at least one child who had not been found, with the largest number of children still missing from a single local authority being 38. The average number of children still missing from each of the 38 local authorities was 5, consistent with the research findings in 2014-15. Fewer children were still missing in 2017 than in 2014-15, where 207 had not been found.

Top 5 local authority areas – children still missing (trafficked and unaccompanied children)

Local authority	Number of children still missing
Kent County Council	38
Rochdale	17
Central Bedfordshire	14
Northamptonshire County	12
London Borough of Croydon	11

UK breakdown

UK breakdown: trafficking

PROPORTION OF TRAFFICKED CHILDREN GOING MISSING OUT OF TOTAL REPORTED TRAFFICKED CHILDREN BY COUNTRY

Children identified or suspected as trafficked who went missing

4%
2 of 45

40%
2 of 5

28%
236 of 851

44%
4 of 9
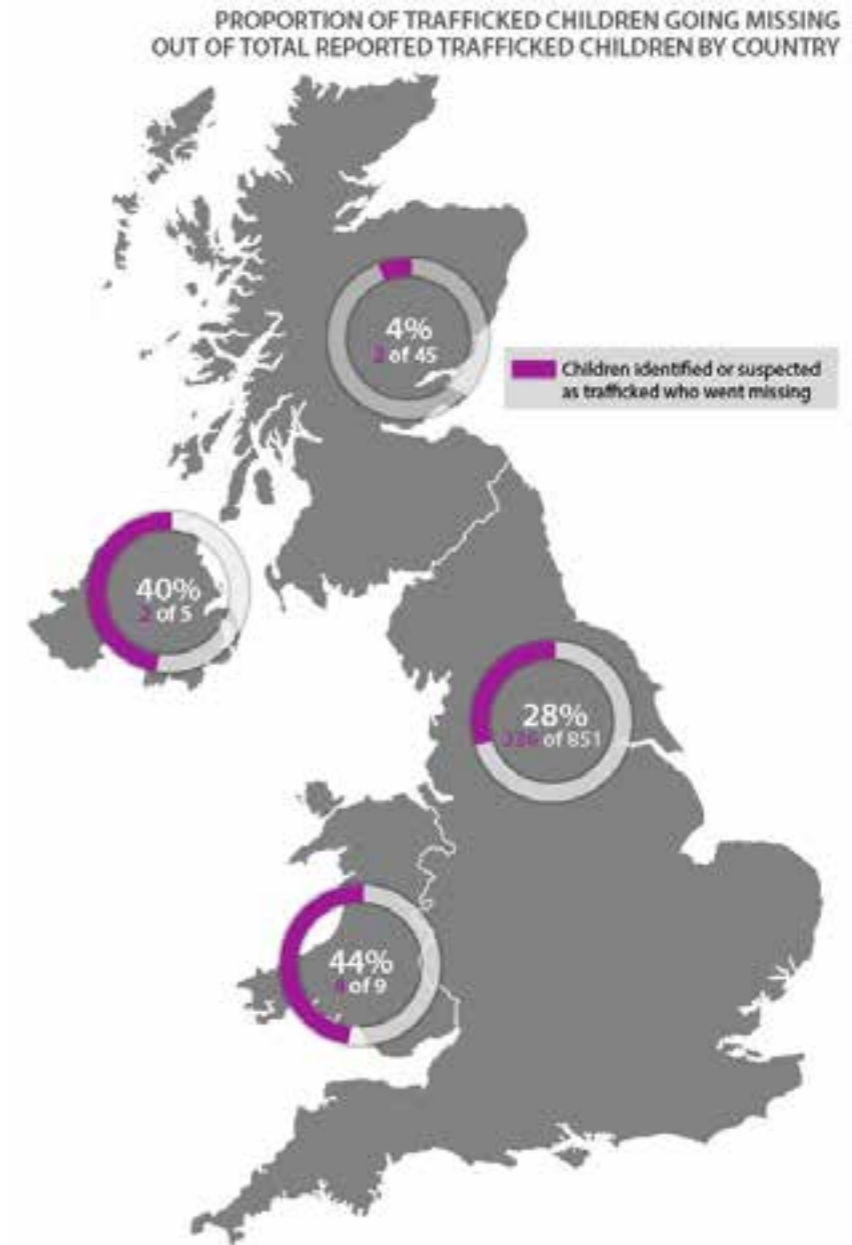
Trafficked children by UK region

Country	Number of children identified or suspected as being trafficked	Children who went missing	Percentage missing
England	851	236	28%
Scotland	45	2	4%
Wales	9	4	44%
Northern Ireland	5	2	40%

UK breakdown: unaccompanied children

PROPORTION OF UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN GOING MISSING
OUT OF TOTAL REPORTED UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN BY COUNTRY
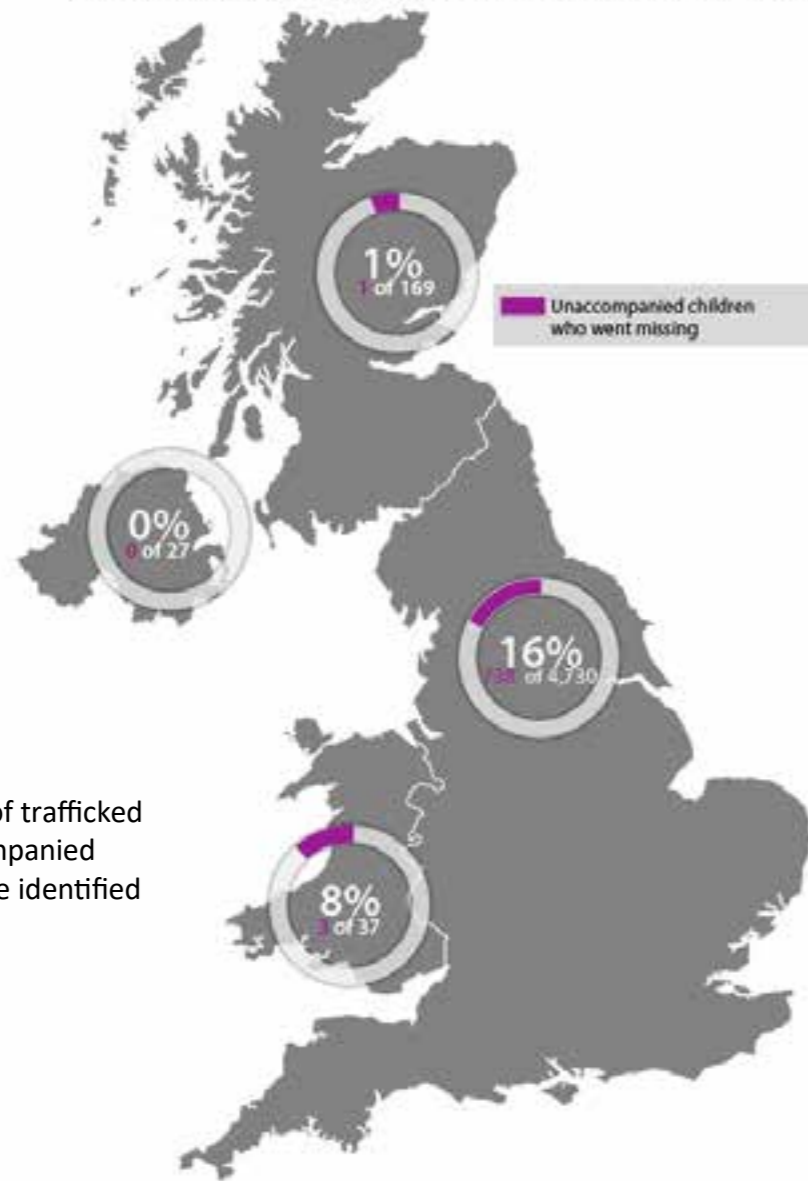
The vast majority of trafficked (94%) and unaccompanied children (95%) were identified in England.

Unaccompanied children by UK region

Country	Number of unaccompanied children	Children who went missing	Percentage missing
England	4,730	738	16%
Scotland	169	1	1%
Wales	37	3	8%
Northern Ireland	27	0	0%

Scotland
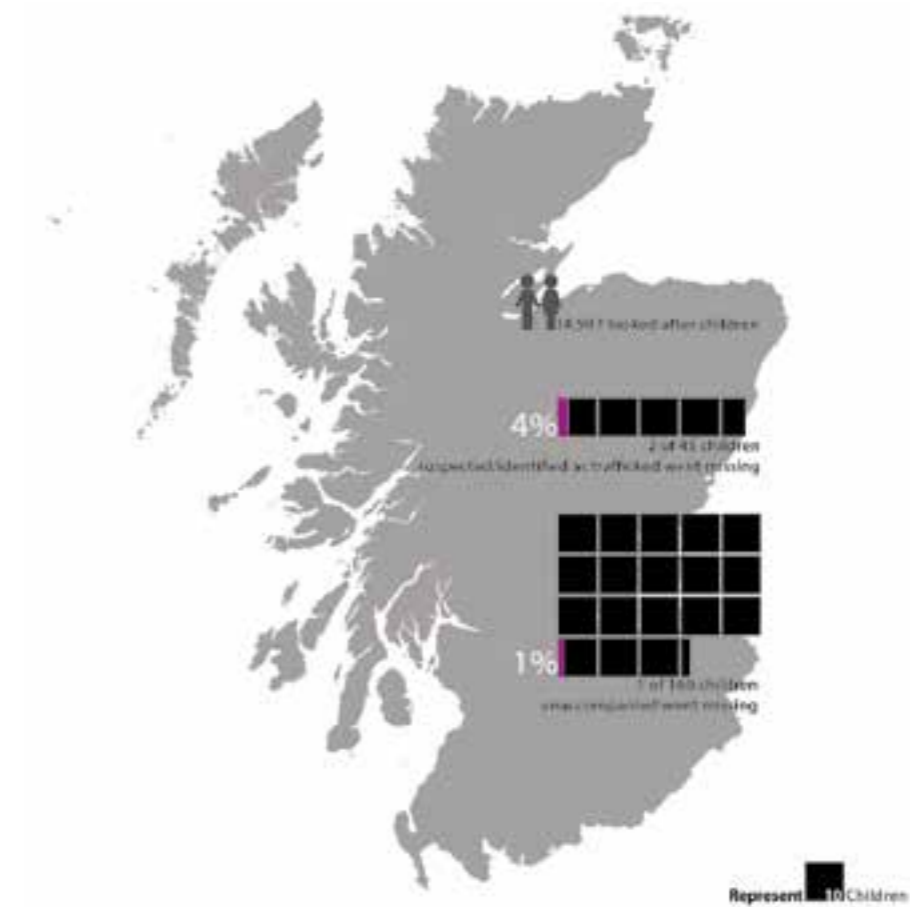
Scotland

Number of looked after children	14,987[17]
Number of children identified or suspected as being trafficked	45
Number of unaccompanied children	169
Number of missing trafficked children	2 (4%)
Number of missing unaccompanied children	1 (1%)

Scotland's devolved children's services have a markedly different approach to that of England and Wales. It is understood that their strong child protection model may be responsible for the lower numbers of children going missing in Scotland, and that good practice can potentially be learned from the Scottish model[18]. Scotland also has a strong system of independent guardianship in place for all unaccompanied children.

17 See: https://statistics.gov.scot/slice?dataset=http%3A%2F%2Fstatistics.gov.scot%2Fdata%2Flooked-after-children

18 Anti-Trafficking Monitoring Group (ATMG), 2018. Before the Harm is Done: Examining the UK's response to the prevention of trafficking. See: http://www.antislavery.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Before-the-Harm-is-Done-report.pdf.

Wales

Wales

Number of looked after children	6,405[19]
Number of children identified or suspected as being trafficked	9
Number of unaccompanied children	37
Number of missing trafficked children	4 (44%)
Number of missing unaccompanied children	3 (8%)

Children's services are devolved to the Welsh Government. The main difference in Wales in terms of support provision is that it is one of the early adopter sites for the Independent Child Trafficking Advocates (ICTA) service, providing specialist support to children identified as trafficked.

Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland

Number of looked after children	2,325[20]
Number of children identified or suspected as being trafficked	5
Number of unaccompanied children	27
Number of missing trafficked children	2 (40%)
Number of missing unaccompanied children	0 (0%)

Northern Ireland's Health and Social Care Trusts (HSCTs) have delegated responsibility for child protection. Northern Ireland's 'Independent Guardians' model, run by Barnardo's, only became operational in spring of 2018, after the data collection period.

19 See: https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Health-and-Social-Care/Social-Services/Childrens-Services/Children-Looked-After/childrenlookedafterat31march-by-localauthority-gender-age

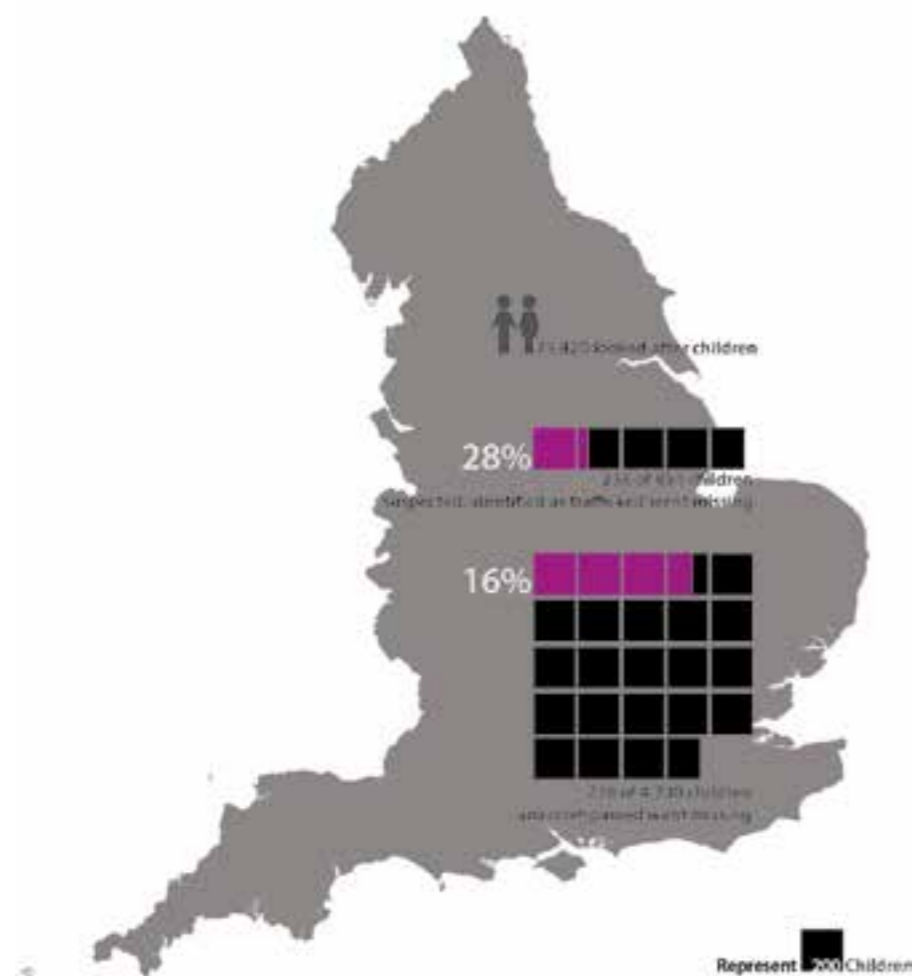20 See: https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/children-care-northern-ireland-201617, note that this figure only relates to those in care continuously for 12 months or longer.

England

England

Number of looked after children	75,420[21]
Number of children identified or suspected as being trafficked	851
Number of unaccompanied children	4,730
Number of missing trafficked children	236 (28%)
Number of missing unaccompanied children	738 (16%)

In England from June 2018, local safeguarding children's boards (LSCBs) were replaced by safeguarding partners, which are responsible for child protection policy, procedure and guidance at a local level. However, these changes were made after the data collection period for this research. In terms of support provision, the Independent Child Trafficking Advocates (ICTA) service is currently in operation in early adopter sites in Greater Manchester and Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.

English regions

Trafficked, suspected trafficked and unaccompanied children by England region

England region	Number of children identified or suspected as being trafficked	Number of unaccompanied children	Number of missing trafficked children	Number of missing unaccompanied children
South East	241	1,235	74 (31%)	344 (28%)
London	166	1,318	17 (10%)	103 (8%)
West Midlands	147	544	38 (26%)	67 (12%)
North West	79	325	28 (35%)	51 (16%)
South West	59	313	17 (29%)	52 (17%)
North	53	277	20 (38%)	28 (10%)
East Midlands	53	267	22 (42%)	19 (7%)
East Anglia	28	401	13 (46%)	70 (17%)
North East	25	50	7 (28%)	4 (8%)
Total	**851**	**4,730**		

The regional spread of unaccompanied children was greater than in 2014-15. This is likely due to the National Transfer Scheme (NTS), which aims to support local authorities with higher numbers of unaccompanied children by allowing for children to be transferred to other local authorities around the country. The scheme was introduced in 2016, so it is likely that the distribution of these children will continue to increase.

As shown in the table above, the South East of England had the highest proportion of children identified or suspected as being trafficked (241 of 851 /28%), followed by London (166 of 851 / 20 %) and the West Midlands (147 of 851 / 17%).

The South East also had the biggest increase in numbers of children identified or suspected as being trafficked from the 2015 data, rising from 69 to 241 children. There were also big jumps in the West Midlands (41 to 147), as well as the North (9 to 53) and South West (12 to 59).

East Anglia had the highest proportion of children identified or suspected as being trafficked going missing from care (46%), and the South East had the highest proportion of unaccompanied children going missing from care (28%).

21 See: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption-2017-to-2018

London

The number of children in London identified or suspected as being trafficked decreased slightly between 2015 and 2017, from 177 to 167. The number of these children who had gone missing also declined from 43 to 17. The number of unaccompanied children who went missing also declined from from 197 to 103. This may indicate improved practice with regard to safeguarding these children, although this cannot be confirmed. While only two local authorities in London reported having zero children who were identified or suspected as victims of trafficking, 17 local authorities were not able or willing to provide information about the numbers in their area. This highlights continuing issues of possible low awareness of trafficking, lack of training and poor recording practices in the London region, as also noted in *Heading Back to Harm* in 2016.

Missing incidents

In addition to the total number of trafficked and unaccompanied children going missing in 2017, the FOI requested information about the number of missing incidents reported for those children. Not all local authorities were able to provide this information,[22] but for those able to:

- There were 1,735 missing incidents for 241 missing trafficked children (an average of 7.2 incidents per child)

- There were There were 2,191 missing incidents for 729 missing children (an average of 3.1 incidents per child)

In some instances, there were extremely high numbers of missing incidents per child; in one local authority, the average number of missing incidents per trafficked child was 46.

The average number of missing incidents per child is substantially higher than the number reported in 2014-15, where each child was reported missing roughly 2.4 times in the year.

7.2

average number of times a missing trafficked child was reported missing in 2017

These figures are also higher than the average number of incidents per child in the general population and for other looked after children. Across the UK 80,000 children are reported missing in 210,000 incidents, meaning that each child will have an average of 2.6 missing incidents. For looked after children this rises to an average of 6 reported missing incidents per year.

Repeat missing episodes are a significant issue, particularly for trafficked children, and they should be seen as a key risk indicator necessitating intervention and support. Wider evidence from police suggests that nearly a third (62%) of missing children episodes are attributable to repeat incidents.[23]

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22 67 local authorities were able to provide information about the missing incidents of trafficked children; 89 were able to provide information about the missing incidents of unaccompanied children.

23 National Crime Agency Missing Persons Burea, 2016. Missing Persons Data Report 2015-16. See: http://missingpersons. police.uk/en/resources/missing-persons-da ta-report-2015-16.

'Top 5' local authorities in terms of missing incidents per missing trafficked (identified or suspected) child

Local authority	Number of missing children identified or suspected as being trafficked	Number of incidents relating to children identified or suspected as being trafficked	Average no. of incidents
Leicester	6	276	46
Middlesbrough	5	141	28.2
Knowsley	4	75	18.8
Redbridge London Borough Council	1	18	18
Newcastle upon Tyne	2	35	17.5

'Top 5' local authorities in terms of missing incidents unaccompanied children

Local authority	Number of missing unaccompanied children (individuals)	Number of missing incidents for missing unaccompanied children	Average number of incidents
Kingston upon Thames	11	74	6.7
Northamptonshire County Council	11	68	6.2
Dorset County Council	1	6	6.0
Camden London Borough Council	10	53	5.3

Missing durations

Local authorities were asked to provide information on the duration of missing episodes for trafficked and unaccompanied children. Few local authorities were able to provide this information, but based on the information provided, in the vast majority of incidents – 98% of children identified or suspected as being trafficked and 92% of unaccompanied children – children returned or were found within a week of going missing. Notably, unaccompanied children were more likely to be missing for over a week than both trafficked children and the wider population of UK children. Over 8% of unaccompanied children were missing for over a week, compared to only 2% of other missing children.

However, these figures relate to missing incidents and should be seen in the context of the data provided about the number of children who remain missing: 169 children in 2017 had not returned at the time of data collection.

Missing in the context of local authority looked after children numbers

The table below shows the numbers of trafficked and unaccompanied children going missing as a proportion of the total numbers of looked after children in that area. The table shows the top five areas with the highest proportion of these children in their looked after child population.

In Kent, which ranked the highest, almost 16% of all looked after children were unaccompanied or trafficked children who had gone missing at least once. This is a substantial proportion of children in care who are clearly highly vulnerable and in need of specialist support and attention.

'Top 5' local authorities with highest proportion of trafficked and unaccompanied children going missing out of the total numbers of looked after children

Local authority area	Children identified or suspected as victims of trafficking going missing	Unaccompanied children going missing	Total missing	Looked after children (2017)	As proportion of looked after children
Kent County Council	39	257	296	1900	15.6%
Westminster	Not provided	13	13	180	7.2%
Shropshire Council	9	8	17	290	5.9%
Portsmouth	21	-	21	360	5.8%
Camden London Borough Council	Not provided	10	10	200	5.0%

Nationality and gender
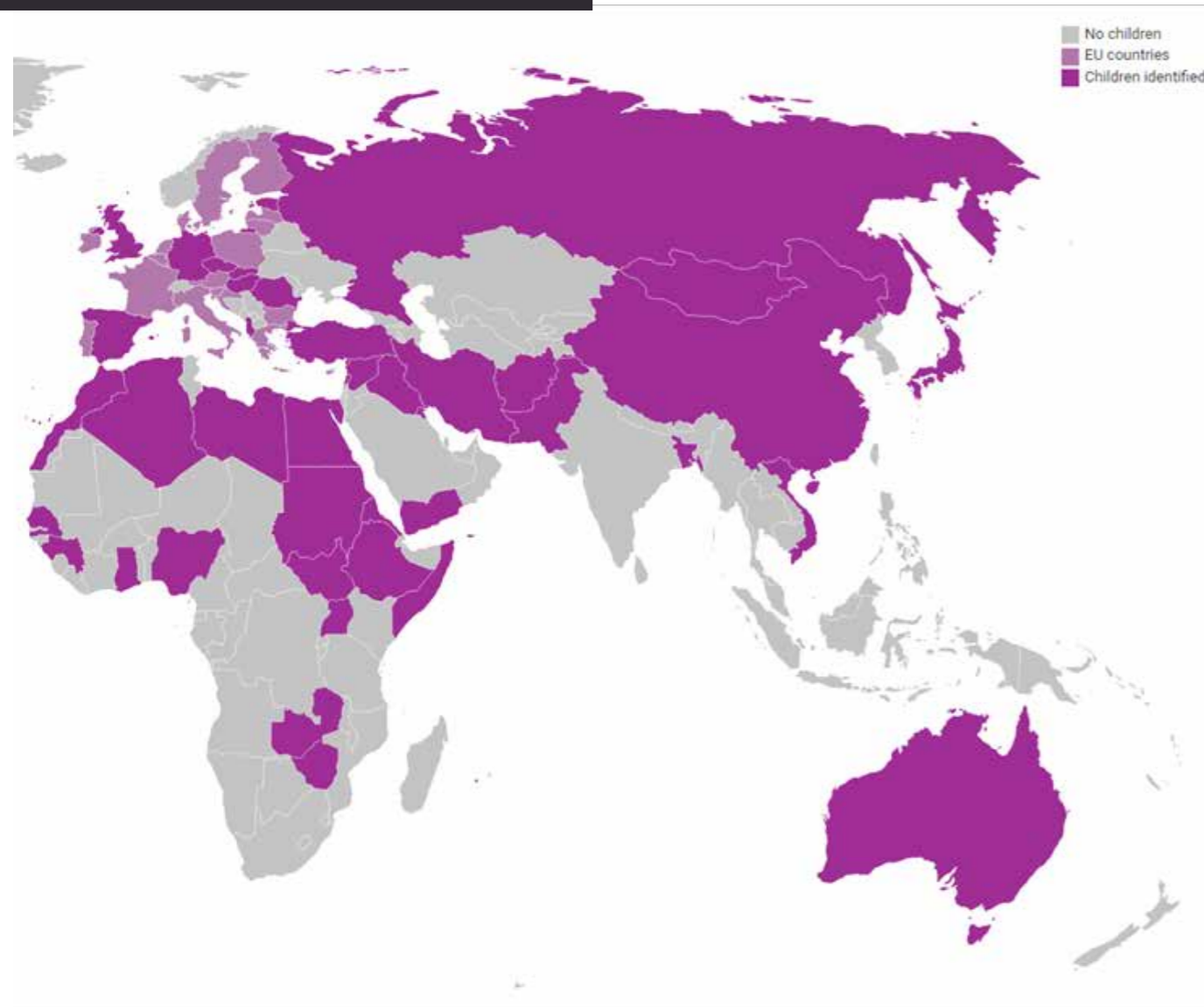
The map above shows the countries of origin of trafficked and unaccompanied children.[24]
Many local authorities were not able to provide this information or provided broader nationality such as 'EU' or 'non-EU', largely in order to protect the anonymity of the individuals.
As such, this cannot be treated as a complete and accurate data set.

Where nationality was specified, the 'top 10' countries of origin are provided in the table opposite.

Local authorities were asked to provide details about the gender as well as the nationality of those in their care. Where local authorities were willing and able to provide both nationality and gender information, male children represented more highly than female children, for both trafficked and unaccompanied children. For trafficked children in local authority care, 72% were male (113 out of 158) and 28% were female (45 out of 158). For unaccompanied children, the vast majority were male: 91% (785 out of 864) compared to 9% female (79 out of 864).

24 No responses identified any children from the Americas, so this area has not been included in the map.

'Top 10' nationalities of children identified or suspected as being trafficked

Nationality	Male	Female	Not specified	Total
Vietnamese	13	7	100	120
Non-EU (where not specified)	51	24	1	76
EU (where not specified)	22	17	15	54
British	10	6	22	38
Eritrean	2	5	3	10
Afghan	5	0	3	8
Ethiopian	0	4	4	8
Albanian	0	0	5	5
African (where not specified)	5	0	0	5
Egyptian	3	0	0	3

'Top 10' nationalities of unaccompanied children

Nationality	Male	Female	Not specified	Total
Non-EU (where not specified)	353	20	325	698
Vietnamese	66	26	56	148
Sudanese	64	0	83	147
Eritrean	49	13	72	134
Afghan	55	0	59	114
Albanian	35	3	36	74
Iraqi	46	1	19	66
Iranian	33	0	26	59
African (where not specified)	28	4	3	35
EU (where not otherwise specified)	18	0	15	33

Nationality, gender and missing

Data on the nationalities of the children who were identified as going missing is very limited from the FOI responses. However, of those that were recorded, Vietnamese children were most likely to go missing from both groups. From those that responded, 22 trafficked and 20 unaccompanied Vietnamese children went missing from care in 2017. Other nationalities of children identified or suspected as being trafficked who were reported as missing were (in order of prevalence): British, Egyptian, Eritrean and Hungarian. For unaccompanied children reported as missing, nationalities specifically reported were (in order of prevalence): Sudanese, British, Eritrean, Iraqi, Albanian, Iranian, Egyptian, Syrian, Afghan, Ethiopian, South Sudanese, Chinese and Turkish.

Where local authorities were able to provide information on both the nationality and gender of those being reported missing, more male children were reported missing for both trafficked and unaccompanied children. Of trafficked children reported missing, 76% were male (38 out of 50), and 24% were female (12 out of 50). For unaccompanied children, again the vast majority of those reported missing were male, with 91% (123 out of 135) of the children reported missing being male compared to 9% (12 out of 135) being female.

Significant numbers of local authorities did not report on the specific number of children, as well as breakdowns of their gender and nationality, because of the possibility of identifying the children. For example:

"I can advise, under Section 38(1)(b) of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002, that the number individuals identified in answer to your request is less than 5 (but more than 0). However, we are unable to provide you with the exact number as we are concerned that this release might allow for the identification of any of the people who may be involved."

A number also noted that nationality was not recorded in care records:

"Nationality is not a generally recorded or reportable feature of care record and as above it would exceed the cost threshold to review the full care records in an attempt to collate any related details that are held."

Responses from local authorities

There were significant improvements in response rates from local authorities in 2018 compared to when the first set of data was collected in 2016. A total of 2017 local authorities were asked for information, with 203 (96%) responding in some way to the request.

There are suggestions that data recording and reporting practices have improved since 2015; the number of local authorities reporting that there were no children identified or suspected as being trafficked decreased from 106 to 53.

However, there were still significant challenges in collecting data of this kind from local authorities. A significant number of local authorities reported simply "information not held" or "unable to answer" for a number of the questions. Among the reasons given for not responding to certain aspects of the FOI, the most common was related to the time and cost of locating the information. Many local authorities cited an exemption set out in 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".[25] For example:

"The review established that the information you requested is, as the response stated, held in individual files, which would mean that to respond to your request would require a manual search of the files. In the circumstances I am satisfied that complying with your request would exceed the appropriate limit, and that exemption 12 was properly applied."

Reasons cited included not holding the relevant data and not holding it in a readable format. One local authority did not provide data on child trafficking but said that their practice had recently changed:

"Information relating to modern slavery and people trafficking was only recorded from 2018 onwards."

Despite improvements, it is clearly still problematic that local authorities cannot easily identify data on these issues. There remains inconsistency in the way in which data is collected and recorded across local authorities in the UK, which raises concerns about how, at a local and national level, Governments are able to understand trends and strategically respond to these issues.

25 In reference to Section 12 of the Freedom of Information Act.

Legislation and Policy context

Legislation

The UK Government is obliged under a range of international legal instruments to protect children from exploitation and abuse, prosecute offenders and prevent harm.[26] The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child applies to all children in the UK, regardless of their nationality or immigration status.[27] However, the UK Government has faced criticism over its adherence to international standards on the rights of the child, including specific failures around migrant and trafficked children.[28]

In 2015, legislation was brought in across the UK specific to the issue of modern slavery and trafficking.[29] The three Acts all include provisions aimed at the protection of child victims. The risks of unaccompanied and trafficked children going missing, and the duties upon statutory services, are also well established within statutory guidance. This includes the Department for Education's guidance for local authorities, updated in 2017, *Care of unaccompanied migrant children and child victims of modern slavery*.[30]

Policy developments

There have been some policy developments on this issue since the publication of *Heading Back to Harm*. In their latest strategic documents on tackling trafficking and modern slavery, the UK Governments have indicated an awareness of the links between trafficking and missing, as well as the particularly high risks facing unaccompanied children.[31] Positively, the issue of trafficked children going missing is also stated as a UK Government research priority.[32]

Prevention of missing

The Department for Education's funding for training foster carers and support workers caring for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC), including those at high risk of going missing or being re-trafficked, has been a welcome step forward in preventing children going missing.[33] Provision for 1,000 training places was provided in 2016-17, and a further 1,000 places were provided in 2018. While not specifically focused on trafficked and unaccompanied children, in Scotland, the Scottish Government is also funding

26 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989; United Nations Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, 2002; UN Trafficking Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, 2000; Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, 2008; EU Directive on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims, 2011/36/EU.

27 In 2008, the UK Government lifted its Reservation on Article 22 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child with regards to immigration and nationality, meaning that the principles within the Convention are applied to all children, irrespective of their immigration status.

28 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.

29 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.

30 Department for Education, 2013. Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care. See: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/sys tem/uploads/attachment_data/file/307867/ Statutory_Guidance_-_Missing_/from_ care__3_.pdf; Department for Education, 2017. Care of unaccompanied migrant children and child victims of modern slavery: Statutory guidance for local authorities. See: https:// assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/ attachment_data/file/656429/UASC_Statutory_Guidance_2017.pdf.

31 UK Government, 2018 UK annual report on modern slavery, 2018. See: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/652366/2017_uk_annual_report_on_modern_slavery.pdf; Scottish Government, Human Trafficking and Exploitation Strategy, 2017. See: https://beta.gov.scot/publications/trafficking-exploitationstrategy/pages/5/; Northern Ireland Department of Justice, Northern Ireland Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery Strategy 2016/2017, 2016. See: www.octf.gov.uk/OCTF/media/OCTF/documents/publications/Human%20Trafficking/Final-NI-Human-Trafficking-and-Modern-SlaveryStrategy-2016-17.pdf?ext=.pdf.

32 UK Government, 2018 UK annual report on modern slavery, 2018. See: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/652366/2017_uk_annual_report_on_modern_slavery.pdf.

33 UK Government, 2018 UK annual report on modern slavery, 2018. See: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/652366/2017_uk_annual_report_on_modern_slavery.pdf.

Missing People from April 2016 to March 2019 to market *"helpline services directly to young people in Scotland, to ensure that more children and young people are supported when they are thinking of going missing or need help to stay safe."*[34] The Modern Slavery Police Transformation Unit is also currently undertaking research into the issue of child trafficking and missing.

Another step has been taken by the UK police, who have piloted capturing the biometric data (photographs and fingerprints) of unaccompanied children, designed to ensure that the information *"allows for missing children to be easily identifiable if found and is also used to help support investigations into missing episodes"*.[35] Despite the positive aims of this pilot to improve safeguarding, there are significant concerns about the sharing of children's information with immigration enforcement. There is a lack of clarification or publicly available information on how a child's personal data may be used in an immigration context.

Child criminal exploitation

The Home Office's 2018 Serious Violence Strategy[36] gives significant attention to the issue of child criminal exploitation in 'county lines' situations, and the high rates of these children going missing. A Home Office funded pilot service was undertaken by the charities St Giles Trust and Missing People to provide support to young people exploited in this way.[37] This document also outlines

that the Missing Strategy is due to be refreshed with the publication of an implementation plan to reflect those who go missing in the context of county lines criminality.[38] A Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) funded pan-London county lines service has also been established to support children affected by this type of exploitation in London.[39]

Guardianship/advocacy services

The Government has re-stated its commitment to rolling out the Independent Child Trafficking Advocate (ICTA) scheme across England and Wales, announcing that by April 2019, the service will be extended to operate in Wales, Greater Manchester, Hampshire, East Midlands and Croydon.[40] The scheme was set out in the Modern Slavery Act, and establishes specialist professionals who act independently and in the child's best interests, and assist them to navigate the complexities of the social care, immigration and criminal justice systems. The evaluations of the service have not specifically shown a reduction in the numbers of children going missing, but have shown significant positive impacts to the children supported by the service.[41] This includes "ensuring clarity, coherence and continuity, working across other services responsible for the child, over time and across contexts", keeping children "safely visible", helping children feel stable enough to plan for their future and reducing their likelihood of further exploitation.[42]

The scheme is currently under review as part of an Independent Review of the Modern Slavery Act.[43] The timeframe for national rollout of the service remains unclear. It does not support unaccompanied children who are not already identified as potential victims of trafficking, so it is limited in assisting with trafficking disclosures and preventing the exploitation of these vulnerable children. A revised model is due to be tested in the new sites; for internally trafficked children, this means ICTAs will work with professionals already supporting the child, rather than directly with the child themselves. This is despite evidence of the effectiveness of specialist support from a trusted individual in certain internal exploitation situations.[44]

Northern Ireland's 'Independent Guardians' became operational in the spring of 2018 (therefore not in place during the timeframe for the data analysed in this research) and is the most comprehensive model of guardianship for unaccompanied and trafficked children in the UK. The Scottish Guardianship Service, which has been in place since 2010 and supports all unaccompanied children, has recently been placed on statutory footing.

Support provision

Despite positive steps forward in understanding the links between trafficking and missing, there are ongoing challenges with regard to poor awareness of the issue and provision of support for child victims of trafficking. A 2017 report commissioned by the Home Office and Department for Education found that there was limited availability of specialist provision for migrant children who are identified as potential victims of modern slavery by local authorities.[45] The reasons identified in the report for why children go missing included an absence of suitable accommodation placement or consistent support from a trusted individual and a failure to support children to integrate effectively into the local community.[46] Concerns about 'inconsistent' and 'patchy' support provision have also been raised by the Council of Europe's Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA).[47] There are also continuing concerns for unaccompanied children, where delays in children being placed in suitable accommodation have been linked to their risk of going missing.[48] Furthermore, there is still no mandatory training for social workers and other local authority staff working with children on the issue of trafficking, modern slavery and exploitation.

34 Scottish Government, Human Trafficking and Exploitation Strategy, 2017. See: https://www.gov.scot/publications/trafficking-exploitation-strategy/.

35 UK Government, 2018 UK annual report on modern slavery, 2018. See: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/652366/2017_uk_annual_report_on_modern_slavery.pdf

36 Home Office, 2018. Serious Violence Strategy. See: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/698009/serious-violence-strategy.pdf.

37 Jo Hudek, 2018. Evaluation of the County Lines Pilot Project. See: https://www.basw.co.uk/resources/evaluation-county-lines-pilot-project.

38 Home Office, 2018. Serious Violence Strategy. See: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/698009/serious-violence-strategy.pdf.

39 J. Hudek, 2018. County lines scoping project. See: file:///C:/Users/c.baker/Downloads/County%20Lines%20Scoping%20Report%20May%202018%20designed.pdf.

40 Home Office, 'Modern slavery victims to receive longer period of support,' 26th October 2017. See: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/modernslavery-victims-to-receive-longer-period-of-support; Home Office, 'New action to tackle modern slavery and support victims' , 10th October 2018: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-action-to-tackle-modern-slavery-and-support-victims.

41 Home Office, Evaluation of Independent Child Trafficking Advocates trial: final report, 2015. See: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/486138/icta-horr86.pdf.

42 Home Office, Evaluation of Independent Child Trafficking Advocates trial: final report, 2015. See: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/486138/icta-horr86.pdf.

43 Home Office, 'Government commissions independent review of the Modern Slavery Act 2015.' 30th July 2018. See: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-commissions-independent-review-of-the-modern-slavery-act-2015.

44 Jo Hudek, 2018. Evaluation of the County Lines Pilot Project 2018. See: https://www.basw.co.uk/resources/evaluation-county-lines-pilot-project; Helen Beckett and Camille Warrington, 2015. Making Justice Work: Experiences of criminal justice for children and young people affected by sexual exploitation as victims and witnesses, University of Bedfordshire. See: http://uobrep.openrepository.com/uobrep/handle/10547/347011

45 Department for Education & Home Office, 2017. Local authority support for non-EEA migrant child victims of modern slavery. See: https://www.ecpat.org.uk/news/report-finds-major-gaps-in-la-support-to-migrant-children.

46 Department for Education & Home Office, 2017. Local authority support for non-EEA migrant child victims of modern slavery. See: https://www.ecpat.org.uk/news/report-finds-major-gaps-in-la-support-to-migrant-children.

47 Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA), 2012. Report concerning the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings by the United Kingdom. See: https://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/sites/antitrafficking/files/greta_report_united_kingdom_2012_en_2.pdf.

48 May Bulman, 'Unaccompanied asylum seeking children going missing in UK due to Home Office delays, finds report.' The Independent, 31st March 2018. See: https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/unaccompanied-asylum-seeking-children-home-office-delays-national-transfer-scheme-report-immigration-a8280446.html.

Return Home Interviews

Statutory guidance stipulates that all children who have been reported missing should be offered an independent return interview upon their return.[49] In light of the links between missing and trafficking, it is clear that these interviews provide an opportunity to identify risks and harm, to engage specialist services when appropriate, and to safeguard the child against further exploitation.

However, there are concerns about the provision of return interviews nationally. Research conducted by The Children's Society found that almost half of local authorities did not have protocols in place for sharing information about missing children with relevant services; the number of return interviews being delivered were low in a number of local authorities; and children who were placed outside of their home area were at risk of not being offered a high quality return interview.[50] It is likely that there are further difficulties for trafficked and unaccompanied children, particularly when English is not their first language.

The NRM for children

There have also been significant concerns about how the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) works in children's cases; particularly that a positive decision does not necessarily lead to

additional support provision. A survey of frontline professionals conducted by ECPAT UK found major concerns about the NRM's ability to safeguard children.[51] A public petition to reform the system gained over 120,000 signatures.[52] Reforms to the NRM were announced in October 2017.[53] Specifically in relation to children, the Government announced that it will look into making the NRM more 'child friendly', however this does not include any consideration of how the system is linked to provision of support for children, or safeguarding them against going missing.

Long term, sustainable solutions

International standards call for a 'durable solution', or in other words, long term, sustainable arrangements to be found for unaccompanied children and children who have been trafficked.[54] This means providing each child with a best interests determination process to ensure that plans are in place, support is made available, and children have the stability to plan for their future.[55] No such provision is in place in the UK. In particular, uncertainty over a child's immigration status leaves children vulnerable to going missing and being trafficked or re-trafficked. The limited provision of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Child (UASC) leave until a child is seventeen-and-a-half, and long delays in asylum and other processes, make them especially vulnerable at this age.

Research conducted in 2017 found that a cause of some young unaccompanied children going 'missing' was that they intentionally chose to disengage from statutory services at 18, because of fear of detention and forced removal.[56] Young people were then likely to become involved in precarious and exploitative work situations, or reach out to underground networks to reunite with family members or to repay debts.

National Transfer Scheme

Since the publication of our Heading Back to Harm research the most significant policy change with regard to unaccompanied children is that the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) has now been operational for the period in which this data was collected. This scheme aims to support local authorities with higher numbers of unaccompanied children by allowing for children to be transferred to other local authorities around the country on a voluntary basis. Concerns have been raised about delays in the scheme and the challenges for local authorities who previously had few unaccompanied children and may not have the necessary skills and expertise to support them, especially around issues concerning trafficking and exploitation.[57]

Wider policy environment

Continued reductions in funding to children's services have meant they are struggling to cope with demand, with huge implications for vulnerable children in care.[58] Cuts have fallen most heavily on prevention, training and early intervention services for children that can prevent them from ending up in situations of exploitation, trafficking and missing. The United Nation's Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights warned in 2015 that the UK Government's cuts to public services and social security reform are in breach of their obligations to human rights, and had a particularly adverse impact on child rights.[59]

Immigration measures designed to deter irregular migration continue to have a detrimental impact on non-UK national children at risk of harm. Public services are increasingly being asked to make immigration checks on individuals accessing services, with information being shared between agencies.[60] These policies can exacerbate children's fear and mistrust of immigration enforcement and of being arrested, detained or returned to their country of origin; preventing them from seeking protection and support.

49 Department for Education, Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care, (2014). See: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/307867/Statutory_Guidance_-_Missing_from_care__3_.pdf

50 The Children's Society, 2017.Making Connections: Understanding how local agencies can better keep missing children safe. See: https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/what-we-do/resources-and-publications/making-connections-understanding-how-local-agencies-can-better

51 ECPAT UK, 2017. Time to Transform: Frontline professionals' views on the National Referral Mechanism. See: https://www.ecpat.org.uk/time-to-transform.

52 https://www.ecpat.org.uk/demand-specialist-support-for-trafficked-children.

53 Home Office, 'Modern Slavery Taskforce agrees new measures to support victims', 17th October 2017: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/modern-slavery-taskforce-agrees-new-measures-to-support-victims; Home Office, 'Modern slavery victims to receive longer period of support,' 26th October 2017: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/modern-slavery-victims-to-receive-longer-period-of- support

54 UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2005. General Comment 6 on the Treatment of Unaccompanied and Separated Children Outside their Country of Origin, para.79; EU Directive Against Trafficking in Human Beings, Articles 16.2 and 14.

55 UNICEF, 2015. Achieving a durable solution for trafficked children. See: https://downloads.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Unicef_DurableSolutions_Report2015.pdf?_ga=2.68372497.1487273109.1541524274-2128396862.1541524274

56 N. Sigona, E. Chase and R. Humphries, 2017. Becoming Adult Project: Understanding causes and consequences of going 'missing'. See: https://becomingadult.net/2017/12/12/six-new-research-briefs-launched-today/.

57 Refugee Children's Consortium, 2017. Briefing on the National Transfer Scheme. See: http://refugeechildrensconsortium.org.uk/national-transfer-scheme/.

58 The Children's Society, 2017. Turning the Tide. See: https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/what-we-do/resources-and-publications/turning-the-tide.

59 UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 2016. Concluding observations on the sixth periodic report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, UN Doc. E/C.12/GBR/CO/6: http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E%2fC.12% 2fGBR%2fCO%2f6&Lang=en

60 Liberty, 2018. A guide to the hostile environment. See: https://www.libertyhumanrights.org.uk/sites/default/files/HE%20web.pdf.

Conclusions and recommendations

This update report has revealed that there remain high numbers of trafficked and unaccompanied children going missing from care in the UK, with significant numbers not being found:

- **910 children were identified or suspected victims of trafficking, with 27% being reported missing in 2017**

- **4,963 unaccompanied children were reported, with 15% being reported missing in 2017**

- **169 children who had gone missing have not been found**

The severity of this child protection issue requires urgent attention by national and local governments. While responses must include improved data collection and reporting, a focus should also be aimed at the prevention of children going missing. Investment is needed in robust safeguarding measures and the provision of specialist support.

Child victims of trafficking are especially vulnerable to going missing; roughly a quarter of these children went missing at least once. They are also likely to go missing several times; in 2017 they went missing on average 7.2 times, an increase from an average of 2.4 times in 2015.

For some local authority areas, unaccompanied and trafficked children who were reported missing comprised a substantial proportion of their overall population of looked after children. In one local authority, 15% of the total population of looked after children were trafficked or unaccompanied

children who had been reported missing. These concerning statistics point to failures to properly safeguard and protect these children at the local level. It is essential that greater resourcing is provided to local authorities in order to address the specific needs of these children, particularly given that there is currently no guaranteed specialist support provision nationwide for child victims of trafficking.

The data for 2017 indicates that there may be improved identification of child victims of trafficking over the past two years. There was an improvement in local authorities' ability to provide the data requested and there was an increase in children identified or suspected as being trafficked from 590 in 2014-15 to 910 this year. Whilst this is a positive sign of some progress in awareness and identification of child victims of trafficking, we cannot rule out that this may also be a result of increased instances of child trafficking.

It is evident from this update report that there is continued need for better data recording and reporting on this issue. With no standardised recording and reporting system in place, the national picture on child trafficking and missing remains patchy. Nor is it possible to evaluate what works to safeguard these children. 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 care. Coupled with the continued issues with data collected through the NRM, there is not yet a comprehensive understanding of the rate of child trafficking and missing in the UK. There is also no national missing database, which would assist our understanding.

Data recommendations

This update report did not seek to address the causes of trafficked and unaccompanied children going missing from care. As such, recommendations based on the 2016 *Heading Back to Harm* report are still useful to highlight areas needing attention. These recommendations are explained in more detail in the original report.

Data-specific recommendations

Improved data recording and reporting would ensure that patterns and prevalence of trafficked and unaccompanied children going missing from care are monitored locally, regionally and nationally to inform resource allocation, risk management and more effective responses.

1. Local authority children's services' recording systems should collect and hold data on each child's history or risk of trafficking. This is in addition to recording it on a child's individual care plan. This trafficking flag should be in a reportable format, allowing for easy analysis and monitoring.

2. Local Safeguarding Children Boards in England, the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland and Child Protection Committees in Scotland should compile at least annual reports to be shared with central Government and other stakeholders. Reports should cover:

   a. Numbers of trafficked, unaccompanied and separated children in their area, including data provided to the NRM

   b. Numbers of trafficked, unaccompanied and separated children who went missing, and the outcomes of those missing episodes

   c. Details of the coordinated response to trafficked, unaccompanied and separated children in their area

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

   a. Trafficked

   b. At risk of trafficking

   c. Unaccompanied or separated child

4. A national missing persons register should be established without delay and should include information about missing children's vulnerabilities and risk indicators, including if they are identified as trafficked or at risk of trafficking.

5. Data collected through the NRM should be improved by:

   a. Ensuring that data is consistently disaggregated according to victim (whether adult or child), the age of the child and the specific type of exploitation, (including criminal exploitation).

   b. Establishing a monitoring system to provide data on the outcomes of children after being referred into the NRM.

Additional recommendations

These recommendations are aimed at ensuring that child victims of trafficking and unaccompanied children are prevented from going missing from care. They are based on the previous *Heading Back to Harm* report published in 2016.

6. **Further child-specific training for professionals and carers** should be provided to address the lack of awareness of the issues and risks faced by trafficked and unaccompanied children. Mandatory training on this issue must be provided to all social workers. Those delivering return home interviews should be trained to be able to identify risks around trafficking and unaccompanied children in order to better prevent repeat missing episodes.

7. **A culture of trust** should be built with trafficked and unaccompanied children to prevent them from going missing by ensuring that a child's first and subsequent encounters with agencies and services are supportive and that all steps taken during their care are clearly explained. Any immigration policies which create a climate of fear and prevent children accessing services should be reviewed and reformed.

8. **A comprehensive, rights-based independent legal guardianship (advocacy) service** should be provided, on a one-to-one basis, for all unaccompanied and trafficked children and young people across the UK without delay. This includes expanding the Independent Child Trafficking Advocates (ICTA) scheme to include unaccompanied children and ensuring that it supports all children on an equal basis.

9. **Safe and appropriate accommodation/ placements** should be available for all trafficked and unaccompanied children. Safety planning must include young people from the beginning.

10. **Risk assessments** 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 and unaccompanied children. Those turning 18 must not be deprioritised.

11. **The NRM** for children should be further reformed to ensure that decisions about whether or not a child has been trafficked are made by trained multi-agency child protection actors under the existing child protection framework, rather than by central Government. Ensure that identification of trafficking through the NRM is linked to specialist support and accommodation for children, based on their individual needs.

12. Provide a **long term-sustainable solution** for every unaccompanied and trafficked child, based on a best interests' determination process, in order to ensure long term stability for these children.

13. **Return home interviews** should be offered to all returned trafficked and unaccompanied missing children and used as an opportunity to better safeguard these children.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Definitions

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.[61]

Child sexual exploitation (CSE)

National guidance states that:*"Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology."*[62]

Child trafficking

Child trafficking is defined in the United Nations Palermo Protocol as the *"recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt"* of a child for the purpose of exploitation.[63] In the UK, trafficking is regarded as a form of modern slavery.

The trafficking of children is a process comprised of two distinct stages: the Act and the Purpose. This is the *"recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or reception of persons, including the exchange or transfer of control over those persons … for the purpose of exploitation."* The definition of child trafficking differs slightly from that of adults, which requires an extra stage for trafficking to be present – that of the 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."* The Means stage is not required for the definition of child trafficking. This is not to say that this stage does not occur for child victims, but the definition recognises that a child cannot give informed consent to his or her own exploitation, even if he or she agrees to travel or understands what has happened.

Child criminal exploitation

There is no clear definition of this form of exploitation, however national guidance states: *"Child Criminal Exploitation… occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18. The victim may have been criminally exploited even if the activity appears consensual. Child Criminal Exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology. Criminal exploitation of children is broader than just county lines, and includes for instance children forced to work on cannabis farms or to commit theft."*[64]

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61 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989.

62 Department for Education, 2017. Child sexual exploitation: Definition and a guide for practitioners, local leaders and decision makers working to protect children from child sexual exploitation. See: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/591903/CSE_Guidance_Core_Document_13.02.2017.pdf.

63 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.

64 Home Office, 2018. Criminal Exploitation of children and vulnerable adults: County Lines guidance. See: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/741194/HOCountyLinesGuidanceSept2018.pdf.

Child in care or 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."*[65]

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."*[66]

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."[67]

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."*[68]

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. The NRM is also the mechanism through which the Modern Slavery Human Trafficking Unit (MSHTU) collects data about victims. This information contributes to building a clearer picture about the scope of human trafficking and modern slavery in the UK."*[69]

National Transfer Scheme

The National Transfer Scheme has been described as a *"voluntary transfer arrangement between local authorities for the care of unaccompanied children who arrive in the UK and claim asylum."* It aims *"to ensure a more even distribution of unaccompanied children across local authorities".*[70]

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.[71]

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."*[72]

Unaccompanied asylum seeking child (UASC)

Department for Education guidance states an unaccompanied asylum seeking child is:

"A child who is claiming asylum in their own right, who is separated from both parents, and who is not being cared for by an adult who in law or by custom has responsibility to do so. Some will not qualify for asylum but may require "humanitarian protection". Others may not qualify for any leave to remain in the UK. Their status will be determined by the Home Office."[73]

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".[74] This report refers to separated, unaccompanied and unaccompanied asylum seeking children collectively as 'unaccompanied children'.

65 Children Act, 1989.

66 National Crime Agency, 2015. NCA Intelligence Assessment: County Lines, Gangs, and Safeguarding. See: http://www.nationalcrime agency.gov.uk/publications/620-NCA-Intelligence-Assessment-Coun ty-Lines-Gangs-and-Safeguarding/file.

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

68 Department for Education, 2013. Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care. See: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/307867/Statutory_Guidance_-_Missing_/from_care__3_.pdf.

69 Home Office, 2016. Government launches National Transfer Scheme for migrant children. See: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-launches-national-transfer-scheme-for-migrant-children.

70 Department for Education & Home Office, 2018. National Transfer Scheme Protocol for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children. See: http://adcs.org.uk/assets/documentation/NTS_Protocol_Final_October_2018.pdf

71 HMIC, 2016. Missing children: who cares? The police response to missing and 'absent' children. See: https://www.justiceinspec torates.gov.uk/hmic/wp-content/uploads/missing-children-who-cares.pdf

72 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989.

73 Department for Education, 2017. Care of unaccompanied migrant children and child victims of modern slavery Statutory guidance for local authorities. See: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/656429/UASC_Statutory_Guidance_2017.pdf.

74 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989.

Appendix 2: Data recording responsibilities

Statutory agencies are obliged to collect and monitor the information sought through this research. 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"*[75].

Guidance for local authorities on the care of unaccompanied migrant children and child victims of modern slavery states that *"Local authorities should ensure that they have processes in place to monitor their policies and performance relating to both unaccompanied children and child victims of modern slavery, including trafficking, and should record modern slavery concerns on the child's care plan."* Furthermore, *"The plan should include a description of how the child's needs in relation to being unaccompanied or trafficked will be met."*[76]

There are also obligations under the provisions of the NRM to refer all cases of children who may have been trafficked, without needing the consent of the child.

Statutory guidance on children who runaway or go missing from care requires data for children missing or away from placement without authorisation to be reported to the Department for Education by the responsible authority.[77] This guidance also 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."* [78]

75 The Care Planning and Care Leavers (Amendment) Regulations 2014; Home Office: National Referral Mechanism: Guidance for Child First Responders. See: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-referral-mechanism-guidance-for-child-first-responders.

76 The Care Planning and Care Leavers (Amendment) Regulations 2014; Home Office: National Referral Mechanism: Guidance for Child First Responders. See: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-referral-mechanism-guidance-for-child-first-responders.

77 Department for Education, Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care, 2014. See: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/307867/Statutory_Guidance_-_Missing_from_care__3_.pdf.

78 Department for Education, 2014. Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care. See: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/307867/Statutory_Guidance_-_Missing_from_care__3_.pdf.

79 Trafficking is defined in Article 4 of the Council of Europe Convention Against Trafficking in Human Beings as "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." However, for the purposes of trafficking in the case of a child there is no requirement to meet the 'means' component within that definition as a child is not able to give informed consent. Therefore, any child who is recruited, transported, transferred, harboured or received for the purposes of exploitation is considered to be a trafficking victim, whether or not they have been forced or deceived.

ii) 'Modern slavery' includes human trafficking, slavery, servitude and forced or compulsory labour for the purpose of exploitation.

80 '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.

Appendix 3: 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. In a piece of work conducted by ECPAT UK and Missing People in 2015, more than 8 out of 10 local authorities provided the data requested below.

Please release the following information relating to looked after children in the care of your authority for the period **1st January 2017** to **31st December 2017**:

1. The total number of looked after children in the care of your authority that have been:

   a. Identified as having been trafficked or a victim of modern slavery – including, but not limited to, those identified through the National Referral Mechanism.

   b. Suspected of having been a victim of trafficking or modern slavery , if not included in a.

   c. Identified as an unaccompanied asylum seeking child (UASC) or a separated child[80].

2. The total number of looked after children in the care of your authority:

   a. Identified or suspected as having been trafficked/victim of modern slavery and that have gone missing or absent.

   b. Identified as an UASC or separated child and that have gone missing or absent.

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/victim of modern slavery 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 of the child (e.g. British, Vietnamese, etc.) If identification is a concern due to small numbers involved, please give the total figures and specify whether the child is British / an EU national / non EU national. For Q3 & Q4, please add the length of time the child was missing during each incident.

Please note that statutory duties include collecting and recording the following:

- Whether a child is a victim of trafficking/modern slavery, or whether there is reason to believe they may be a victim[81]

- Whether a child is an unaccompanied asylum seeking child (UASC)[82]

- Data on children reported missing from care[83]

I would be grateful if you could contact me if there are any issues regarding this request as I understand that under the Act, you are required to advise and assist requesters. If any of this information is already in the public domain, please can you direct me to it, with page references and URLs.

I understand that you are required to respond to my request within 20 working days after you receive this letter. I would be grateful if you could confirm that you have received this request.

Appendix 4: Data tables

Overall figures

Category	Children identified / suspected as being trafficked	Unaccompanied children
Number	910	4,963
Number missing	244	742
% missing	27%	15%

Total number of children identified / suspected as being trafficked	**910**
Number of local authorities with at least one child identified or suspected as being trafficked	**98 (45%)**
Total number of unaccompanied children	**4,963**
Number of local authorities with at least one unaccompanied child	**164 (76%)**

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

Ranking	Local authority	Number of children identified / suspected as being trafficked
1	Croydon London Borough Council	67
2	Southampton City Council	57
3	Kent County Council	45
4	Hillingdon London Borough Council	28
5	Wolverhampton Council, City of	28
6	Sheffield City Council	25
7	Edinburgh City	24
8	Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council	23
9	Staffordshire	22
10	Birmingham City Council	20

10 highest ranked local authorities by number of unaccompanied children

Ranking	Local authority	Number of unaccompanied children
1	Kent County Council	877
2	Croydon London Borough Council	311
3	Birmingham City Council	205
4	Hampshire	157
5	Westminster	151
6	Portsmouth	114
7	Warwickshire County Council	111
8	Manchester	109
9	Barnet	95
10	Glasgow City	94

Children identified as being trafficked: 10 most common reported nationalities

'Top 10' nationalities of those children identified or suspected as being trafficked

Nationality	Male	Female	Not specified	Total
Vietnamese	13	7	100	120
Non-EU (where not specified)	51	24	1	76
EU (where not specified)	22	17	15	54
British	10	6	22	38
Eritrean	2	5	3	10
Afghan	2	0	3	5
Ethiopian	0	4	4	8
Albanian	0	0	5	5
African (where not specified)	5	0	0	5
Egyptian	3	0	0	3

Other nationalities reported: Nigerian, Russian, Asian, Iraqi, Spanish, Czech, Pakistani, Moroccan, Chinese, Kurdish, Slovakian, Sudanese, Hungarian, Polish, Iranian, and Kurdish-Iranian

Unaccompanied children: 10 most common reported nationalities

'Top 10' nationalities of unaccompanied children

Nationality	Male	Female	Not specified	Total
Non-EU (where not specified)	353	20	325	698
Vietnamese	66	26	56	148
Sudanese	64	0	83	147
Eritrean	49	13	72	134
Afghan	55	0	59	114
Albanian	35	3	36	74
Iraqi	46	1	19	66
Iranian	33	0	26	59
African (where not specified)	28	4	3	35
EU (where not otherwise specified)	18	0	15	33

Number of trafficked children by local authority

Local authority	Number of identified trafficked children	Number of suspected trafficked children
Croydon London Borough Council	67	0
Southampton City Council	53	<5
Kent County Council	25	20
Edinburgh City	24	0
Staffordshire	22	Not provided
Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council	19	4
Enfield	19	Not provided
Shropshire Council	15	0
Wolverhampton Council, City of	14	0
Leicester	12	0
Sefton	10	5
Milton Keynes	9	9
Oldham	9	Not provided
Cambridgeshire	8	0
Bexley	7	0
North Yorkshire	6	<5
Bath and North East Somerset Council	6	<5
Poole, Borough of	5	<5
Gloucestershire	4	0
Hillingdon London Borough Council	4	24
Blackburn with Darwen	4	0
Knowsley	4	0
Warwickshire County Council	3	3
Havering London Borough Council	3	0
South Lanarkshire	3	1
Newcastle upon Tyne	3	4
Dumfries and Galloway	3	0
Essex County Council	2	3
Bournemouth	2	Not provided
North Somerset	2	4
Halton	2	Not provided
Rutland	2	Not provided
Aberdeen City	2	0
Wokingham	2	0
Neath Port Talbot	2	0
Barnet London Borough Council	2	
Northamptonshire County Council	1	12

Local authority	Number of identified trafficked children	Number of suspected trafficked children
Durham County Council	1	2
Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council	1	0
Northern	1	0
Central Bedfordshire	0	1
Falkirk	1	Not provided
Telford and Wrekin	1	0
Denbighshire	1	0
Bracknell Forrest Council	0	<5
Argyll and Bute	0	0
Barnsley	0	0
Cornwall Council	0	0
Medway Council	0	0
North Lanarkshire	0	0
North Tyneside Council	0	0
Pembrokeshire	0	0
Torbay	0	0
Haringey London Borough Council	0	10
Suffolk County Council	0	0
Camden London Borough Council	0	0
Leicestershire County Council	0	1
Tower Hamlets	0	0
Redbridge London Borough Council	0	3
Somerset	0	14
Kingston upon Hull	0	11
West Berkshire	0	0
Hackney London Borough Council	0	0
Southend-On-Sea	0	0
North Lincolnshire Council	0	0
Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council	0	0
Warrington	0	4
Plymouth	0	9
South Gloucestershire Council	0	0
Renfrewshire	0	<5
Dorset County Council	0	Not provided
Nottinghamshire County Council	0	10
Herefordshire	0	0
Wigan	0	0
Swansea	0	2
Hartlepool Borough Council	0	0

Local authority	Number of identified trafficked children	Number of suspected trafficked children
Doncaster	0	6
Kirklees Council	0	0
East Riding of Yorkshire	0	0
Redcar and Cleveland	0	0
Dudley	0	1
Rhondda Cynon	0	1
Trafford Metropolitan Police Borough	0	0
York	0	0
North Ayrshire	0	0
Hertfordshire Council	0	4
Carmarthenshire	0	1
Cardiff	0	0
Monmouthshire	0	0
Southern	0	0
Ealing	0	2
Conwy	0	0
East Lothian	0	0
Vale of Glamorgan	0	0
Highland	0	1
Fife	0	0
Gwynedd	0	0
Powys	0	0
West Lothian	0	7
Western	0	3
Flintshire	0	<5
Aberdeenshire	0	0
Angus	0	0
Blackpool Council	0	0
Blaenau Gwent	0	0
Bridgend	0	0
Caerphilly	0	0
Ceredigion	0	0
Clackmannanshire	0	0
Darlington Borough Council	0	0
Dundee City	0	0
East Ayrshire	0	0
East Renfrewshire	0	0
Inverclyde	0	0
Merthyr Tydfil	0	0

Local authority	Number of identified trafficked children	Number of suspected trafficked children
Midlothian	0	0
Moray	0	0
North East Lincolnshire Council	0	0
Orkney	0	0
Scottish Borders	0	0
Shetland Islands	0	0
South Ayrshire	0	0
South Eastern	0	0
South Tyneside	0	0
Stirling	0	0
Western Isles	0	0
Wiltshire County Council	0	0
Swindon	0	0
Bradford	<5	0
Sunderland	<5	<5
Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council	<5	<5
Richmond Upon Thames London Borough	<5	<5
Bury Metropolitan Borough Council	<5	<5
Gateshead	<5	<5
St Helens Metropolitan Borough Council	<5	<5
Thurrock Council	<5	<5
Bedford	<5	<5
Worcestershire	<5	<5
Peterborough City Council	<5	Not provided
Harrow	<5	6
Devon County Council	<5	<5
Kingston upon Thames	<5	<5
Cheshire West and Chester Council	<5	0
Stockport	<5	0
Brighton and Hove City Council	<5	Not provided
City of London	<5	0
Windsor and Maidenhead	<5	0
Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council	<5	6
Middlesbrough	<5	7
Northumberland County Council	<5	0
Wandsworth	<5	<5
East Dunbartonshire	0	0
Perth and Kinross	<3	0
Cumbria	<10	0

Number of unaccompanied children by local authority

Local authority	Number of unaccompanied children	Local authority	Number of unaccompanied children
Aberdeen City	2	Clackmannanshire	0
Aberdeenshire	0	Conwy	2
Angus	0	Cornwall Council	<5
Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council	3	Croydon London Borough Council	311
Argyll and Bute	<5	Cumbria	<10
Barnsley	<5	Darlington Borough Council	0
Barnet	95	Denbighshire	0
Bath and North East Somerset Council	6	Derby City Council	11
Bedford	53	Derbyshire	44
Belfast	17	Devon County Council	39
Bexley	34	Doncaster	9
Birmingham City Council	205	Dorset County Council	15
Blackburn with Darwen	6	Dudley	6
Blackpool Council	0	Dumfries and Galloway	5
Blaenau Gwent	0	Dundee City	0
Bolton Council	13	Durham County Council	12
Bournemouth	20	Ealing	2
Bracknell Forrest Council	<5	East Ayrshire	0
Bradford	13	East Dunbartonshire	0
Bridgend	0	East Lothian	2
Brighton and Hove City Council	10	East Renfrewshire	0
Bristol	65	East Riding of Yorkshire	7
Buckinghamshire	38	Edinburgh City	24
Bury Metropolitan Borough Council	<5	Enfield	60
Caerphilly	0	Essex County Council	93
Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council	22	Falkirk	1
Cambridgeshire	0	Fife	1
Camden London Borough Council	56	Flintshire	0
Cardiff	1	Gateshead	<5
Carmarthenshire	4	Glasgow City	94
Central Bedfordshire	1	Gloucestershire	42
Ceredigion	0	Greenwich, Royal Borough	38
Cheshire East	13	Gwynedd	1
Cheshire West and Chester Council	16	Hackney London Borough Council	25
City of London	8	Halton	5
		Hammersmith and Fulham London Borough Council	52

Local authority	Number of unaccompanied children
Hampshire	157
Haringey London Borough Council	73
Harrow	42
Hartlepool Borough Council	10
Havering London Borough Council	38
Herefordshire	13
Hertfordshire Council	4
Highland	1
Hillingdon London Borough Council	27
Inverclyde	0
Isle of Anglesey	1
Islington London Borough Council	85
Kensington and Chelsea	23
Kent County Council	877
Kingston upon Hull	35
Kingston upon Thames	28
Kirklees Council	8
Knowsley	5
Lancashire	24
Leeds City Council	50
Leicester	22
Leicestershire County Council	49
Lincolnshire County Council	64
Luton Borough Council	35
Manchester	109
Medway Council	<5
Merthyr Tydfil	0
Middlesbrough	5
Midlothian	0
Milton Keynes	57
Monmouthshire	4
Moray	0
Neath Port Talbot	0
Newcastle upon Tyne	10
Norfolk County Council	5
North Ayrshire	5
North East Lincolnshire Council	0
North Lanarkshire	<5

Local authority	Number of unaccompanied children
North Lincolnshire Council	23
North Somerset	11
North Tyneside Council	<5
North Yorkshire	29
Northamptonshire County Council	63
Northern	3
Northumberland County Council	0
Nottinghamshire County Council	14
Oldham	10
Orkney	0
Oxfordshire	0
Pembrokeshire	<5
Perth and Kinross	0
Peterborough City Council	45
Plymouth	18
Poole, Borough of	40
Portsmouth	114
Powys	1
Reading	15
Redbridge London Borough Council	44
Redcar and Cleveland	7
Renfrewshire	16
Rhondda Cynon	6
Richmond Upon Thames London Borough	<5
Rochdale	32
Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council	8
Rutland	5
Salford City Council	20
Sandwell	19
Scottish Borders	0
Sheffield City Council	44
Shetland Islands	0
Shropshire Council	14
Slough	18
Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council	7
Somerset	35
South Ayrshire	0

Local authority	Number of unaccompanied children
South Eastern	0
South Gloucestershire Council	18
South Lanarkshire	15
South Tyneside	0
Southampton City Council	19
Southend-On-Sea	25
Southern	4
Southwark	38
St Helens Metropolitan Borough Council	<5
Staffordshire	76
Stirling	0
Stockport	10
Stoke-on-Trent	17
Suffolk County Council	64
Sunderland	<5
Sutton	<5
Swansea	11
Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council	14
Telford and Wrekin	1
Thurrock Council	<5
Torbay	<10
Tower Hamlets	46
Trafford Metropolitan Police Borough	6
Vale of Glamorgan	2
Wakefield	19
Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council	15
Wandsworth	38
Warrington	19
Warwickshire County Council	111
West Berkshire	30
West Lothian	0
Western	0
Western Isles	0
Westminster	151
Wigan	12
Wiltshire County Council	0
Windsor and Maidenhead	8

Local authority	Number of unaccompanied children
Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council	<5
Wokingham	2
Wolverhampton Council, City of	14
Worcestershire	46
York	6

Children identified / suspected as being trafficked who were reported missing

Total number of children identified / suspected as trafficked who went missing	244
Percentage of children identified / suspected as trafficked who went missing	27%

Missing incidents for children identified / suspected as being trafficked

Number of children identified / suspected as trafficked in areas also reporting number of incidents	241
Number of missing incidents	1,735
Average number of missing incidents per child	7.2

Unaccompanied children who were reported missing

Total number unaccompanied children who went missing	742
Percentage of children identified / suspected as trafficked who went missing	15%

Missing incidents for unaccompanied children

Number of unaccompanied children in areas also reporting number of incidents	729
Number of missing incidents	2,191
Average number of missing incidents per child	3

Country	Number of children identified or suspected as being trafficked who have gone missing
England	236
Northern Ireland	2
Scotland	4
Wales	2
Grand Total	**244**

Missing children identified / suspected as being trafficked children by region

Number of children identified or suspected as being trafficked who have gone missing by region, by percent of total number of trafficked children

Region	Number of children identified or suspected as being trafficked	Number who went missing	Percentage who went missing
East Anglia	28	13	17%
East Midlands	53	22	42%
London	166	17	10%
North	53	20	38%
North East	25	7	27%
North West	79	28	35%
Northern Ireland	5	2	40%
Scotland	45	2	4%
South East	241	74	31%
South West	59	17	29%
Wales	9	4	44%
West Midlands	147	38	26%
Grand Total	**910**	**244**	**27%**

Missing unaccompanied children by country

Country	Number of unaccompanied children who have gone missing
England	738
Scotland	1
Wales	3
Grand Total	**742**

Missing unaccompanied children by region

Region	Number of unaccompanied children who have gone missing	Number of unaccompanied children in region	Percentage unaccompanied children who have gone missing
East Anglia	70	401	17%
East Midlands	19	267	7%
London	103	1,318	8%
North	28	277	10%
North East	4	50	8%
North West	51	325	16%
Northern Ireland	0	27	0%
Scotland	1	169	1%
South East	344	1,235	28%
South West	52	313	17%
Wales	3	37	8%
West Midlands	67	544	12%
Grand Total	**742**	**4,963**	**15%**

Duration of missing incidents

Duration of missing incidents

Duration	Children identified or suspected as being trafficked	Unaccompanied children	England and Wales police stats
Under 24 hours (number and percentage)	419 (74.7%)	305 (62.1%)	80%
Between 1 and 2 days (number and percentage)	79 (14.1%)	68 (13.8%)	10%
Between 3 and 7 days (number and percentage)	51 (9.1%)	78 (15.9%)	Not provided
Under 7 days total (number and percentage)	549 (97.9%)	451 (81.9%)	98%
7 days and over (number and percentage)	12 (2.1%)	40 (8.1%)	2%

Still missing

Children who are still missing (trafficked and unaccompanied children)

Number of children not returned / found	**169**
Percentage of total missing	**17% (169 of 986)**