

Child trafficking in Birmingham, Coventry and Solihull

A report on the evidence and agency responses to child
trafficking

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ECPAT UK is a coalition of leading charities, including Save the Children, Anti-Slavery International, Barnardo's, Jubilee Campaign, NSPCC, The Children's Society, The Body Shop Foundation, UNICEF and World Vision.

Save the Children fights for children in the UK and around the world who suffer from poverty, disease, injustice and violence.

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1. Executive summary

This report presents the findings of a small-scale qualitative study to find out: first, whether there have been any confirmed or suspected cases of child trafficking in Birmingham, Coventry and Solihull; second, the levels of awareness of child trafficking; and third, how children's social services and other agencies have responded to such cases. It is one of three reports being published by Save the Children and ECPAT UK on trafficking of children and young people in a number of locations in England. Research was also carried out in Manchester and Newcastle. Interviews were conducted with representatives from children's social services, the local immigration service, local government, the police and voluntary sector organisations.

Statutory authorities in Birmingham, Coventry and Solihull identified 32 children and young people as possibly having been trafficked. These children and young people were suspected of being exploited in a number of ways, including working in a cannabis factory, domestic servitude, working in the catering industry, sexual exploitation through prostitution, manual labour and benefit fraud. Debt bondage was suspected in some cases.

Much of the evidence of child trafficking presented in this report comes from the children's social services teams responsible for supporting separated children who are seeking asylum in Birmingham, Coventry and Solihull. It is likely, therefore, that this evidence represents only the tip of the iceberg in terms of the number of children and young people who have been trafficked and are living in the three areas. Many trafficked children are not likely to be claiming asylum and the clandestine nature of child trafficking means that many have no contact with the authorities and remain hidden.

A very serious concern is the number of separated young people who have gone missing while under the care of children's social services. Interviews recorded a total of 21 young people who had gone missing out of the 32 children and young people identified as possibly having been trafficked – all but one went missing while under the care of children's social services. Going missing was often the trigger for the authorities to suspect that the young person was a victim of child trafficking. Only four young people have made contact with children's social services again and the rest remain missing. Three of the four young people who have made contact again have disclosed harrowing experiences of what happened while they were missing from local authority care, which indicates that they were indeed trafficked.

Alongside suspected cases of separated asylum-seeking children being trafficked in the area, concerns were also raised during the research about vulnerable children in private fostering arrangements¹.

Awareness of child trafficking in the region is growing and there is a good awareness in the unaccompanied minors teams in children's social services in all three areas. Moreover, Solihull has produced guidelines on 'Safeguarding Children from Abroad', which include a small section on child trafficking. Overall, however, anti-trafficking efforts are in their infancy and there is a lack of awareness of the issue, and specifically how to identify suspected child trafficking victims, outside of asylum work – for example, in other children's services teams, among health workers, teachers, and voluntary sector workers. The concern is that because of this lack of awareness, many young people who are trafficked are likely to

go undetected. The research also found that there is a tendency to associate child trafficking with sexual exploitation through prostitution. However, the findings demonstrate that child trafficking is not limited to this, and is associated with a whole range of exploitative work, including domestic servitude, cannabis factory work, catering work, benefit fraud and manual labour.

There are a number of concerns regarding measures to tackle child trafficking, and the number of young people going missing from children's social services care itself raises concerns about identification and protection of young people on arrival. There is little specific support provided to young people who have been or are suspected of being trafficked in the area, including safe accommodation such as specialist foster placements.

However, one unaccompanied minors team has tried to tackle this in relation to the number of young females from China going missing by providing additional support, through 24-hour surveillance, on arrival. Yet even in this situation young people have still gone missing. This is an example of the complexity of providing adequate protection and support to victims of suspected child trafficking.

A related concern about missing children, raised by a number of participants in the research, was the perceived low priority given to cases of child trafficking by the police. The police representative stated that efforts were being made to improve consistency of response in the area.

To tackle these concerns, this report sets out a series of recommendations (see pages 21-24) aimed at relevant agencies, including the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB), children's social services, the police, immigration services, voluntary agencies, education services, and the health service.

2. Introduction

2.1 *The research*

The impetus to carry out this research came from the response ECPAT UK received following the publication of ‘Cause for Concern? London Social Services and Child Trafficking’ in 2004.² This was a research report on the issue of child trafficking based on interviews with children’s social services teams in London. After ‘Cause for Concern?’ was published, ECPAT UK received dozens of reports from across the UK about victims of child trafficking. These suggested that rather than being a London-centred problem or being focused on the south-east of England where the larger air and seaports are, the trafficking of children was increasing in locations that had smaller regional ports of entry and/or ethnically diverse populations. In early 2006 ECPAT UK, with the support of Save the Children UK’s England Programme, decided to carry out research in other parts of England to find out more about the extent of the problem.

This report is one of a series being published by Save the Children and ECPAT UK on trafficking of young people in a number of locations in England. Research was also carried out in Manchester and Newcastle. There is also a summary report which pulls together the findings of the research and sets it in the context of current national policy debates on child trafficking.³

The objectives of this research were:

- to determine levels of awareness of child trafficking issues among children’s social services teams in the selected local authorities
- to ascertain whether any confirmed or suspected cases of child trafficking had been identified by children’s social services
- to explore how cases of child trafficking that had been identified were dealt with by children’s social services
- to examine reporting procedures for cases of child trafficking
- to explore the extent to which local authorities promote co-operation between statutory and other agencies, and the extent to which agencies share information and work together to meet the needs of trafficked children.

2.2 *What is child trafficking?*

Children are trafficked for a number of purposes, including sexual exploitation through prostitution, illegal adoption, under-age forced marriage, benefit fraud and child labour (eg, domestic servitude, work in sweatshops, criminal work like begging or producing and selling drugs). Child trafficking works through personal and family networks, as well as through highly organised international criminal networks.

2.2.1 *Definition of child trafficking*

There are a number of different definitions of child trafficking.⁴ However, the internationally accepted definition of child trafficking that is most frequently cited comes from the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (2000), commonly known as the Palermo protocol, which was ratified by the UK government on 6 February 2006. It defines child trafficking as:

“The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered ‘trafficking in persons’ even if this does not involve any of the means set forth (elsewhere in the Protocol).”⁵

The overall definition in the protocol is:

“‘Trafficking in persons’ shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of persons, by means of threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at the minimum, the exploitation or the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or removal of organs.”⁶

Under this protocol a child is defined as anyone under 18 years of age, as defined by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 (UNCRC).

2.2.2 *Cross-border and internal child trafficking*

Child trafficking involves children being transported for the purposes of exploitation. Crucially, this movement can take place across borders or within them (known as internal trafficking). In the UK context this means that a child could arrive from abroad via means that do not involve trafficking, but later on find themselves in a vulnerable position and be trafficked internally within the UK.

Also worth noting is that this movement can be legal or illegal. In many cases children arrive from abroad illegally, for example, on false documents; they may also arrive in the UK legally, for example, on short-term visas, education visas or as nationals who do not need a visa to enter, eg, European Economic Area (EEA) nationals.

2.2.3 *The difference between child smuggling and child trafficking*

It is the *intent* to exploit which makes child trafficking distinct from child smuggling. The smuggling of people simply involves the transportation of people from one place to another – it may involve some elements of exploitation along the way, in that people may be charged extremely high fees for the journey. But it is different from child trafficking because on arrival the smugglers have no intent to exploit those they are moving.

2.2.4 Coercion and deception in child trafficking

Child trafficking does not have to involve coercion or deception, unlike adult trafficking. Any situation involving children being moved for the purposes of exploitation is considered to be trafficking, whether or not the child agrees to it, as stated in the Palermo protocol definition quoted on page 7:

2.3 Child trafficking in the UK – what we know

The issue of child trafficking was first raised in 1995 by social workers in West Sussex children's social services, after a child went missing. Soon after, a pattern emerged and it became known that some children – mainly females from Nigeria – were being taken to Europe to be prostituted. Despite the fact that it is now over ten years since the issue of child trafficking first came to light, little is actually known about the real extent of the problem,⁷ and there are certainly no reliable statistics. What we do know can be gleaned from research carried out with children's social services teams and other service providers, and evidence from police operations such as Operation Pentameter (see below).

In 2004 ECPAT UK published its report, 'Cause for Concern? London Social Services and Child Trafficking'. This scoping study interviewed children's social services staff across London and identified 35 cases of child trafficking in 17 boroughs. Out of 33 London boroughs, 26 had concerns about child trafficking. 'Cause for Concern?' identified that child trafficking existed beyond sexual exploitation through prostitution to encompass the exploitation of children in domestic servitude, restaurant/catering work, building site work, begging, drug trafficking and benefit fraud. Of particular concern was the trend towards the exploitation of African females as young as 11 years old in domestic servitude, often under the guise of private fostering. Victims of child trafficking came from a range of countries across Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe.

In 2005 a study carried out by Barnardo's⁸ found that 12 out of 32 local authority representatives were aware of cases of young people from abroad who had been sexually exploited. In addition, 20 health service and voluntary sector agencies identified 52 young people from abroad who had been sexually exploited. Based on the information available (it was impossible to check for duplication of cases), Barnardo's estimated that the number of young people who had been identified as trafficked for sexual exploitation was between 14 and 66.⁹

In 2006 Operation Pentameter was launched as part of the government's campaign to clamp down on 'modern-day slavery'. Involving police and other agencies both in the UK and across Europe, the operation focuses on women who are being trafficked for purposes of sexual exploitation through prostitution. Despite this focus on women, at least 12 females under the age of 18 were identified, the youngest of whom was 14.

2.4 Policy context

There are a number of international human rights instruments that explicitly require states to prohibit child trafficking, to investigate, prosecute and punish traffickers and to protect victims of child trafficking.¹⁰ There are also an increasing number of national laws against

child trafficking, including the Sex Offences Act (2003) and the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2004, which introduced a new offence for trafficking for labour exploitation.

Moreover, in response to an inquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié, the government published 'Every child matters: next steps' and subsequently the Children Act 2004 was passed. Many elements of the Children Act 2004 and the 'Every child matters' agenda are relevant to policy and practice responses to child trafficking. Key to the 'Every child matters' agenda is that children should be kept safe from maltreatment, neglect, violence and sexual exploitation and, correspondingly, they should be provided with security and stability and be cared for.¹¹ There are various mechanisms being implemented to achieve this. The setting up of Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs) is particularly relevant to supporting trafficked children. LSCBs are new bodies that supersede Area Child Protection Committees (ACPCs). They are the appropriate bodies with which to raise concerns about child trafficking, and through which appropriate and effective guidance might be developed. This includes producing guidelines on safeguarding children from abroad and providing training on child trafficking in the local area.

3. Methodology

This report presents the findings of a small-scale qualitative study. The research was primarily carried out by conducting semi-structured face-to-face interviews with 14 key representatives from children's social services, local immigration, local government and voluntary sector organisations involved in issues surrounding vulnerable children from abroad. The face-to-face interviews explored questions relating to the objectives of the research (described on page 6). The list of agencies consulted is in appendix 1. Three telephone interviews were conducted with those who were unable to meet the researcher during the initial week.

Interviews were conducted in Birmingham, Solihull and Coventry during September and October 2006. As this was the first time case information had been discussed in the context of research on child trafficking, interviewees were encouraged to provide information on all case histories no matter how old they were. The vast majority of known or suspected cases of child trafficking provided in this research occurred between 2004 and 2006.

Information provided on child trafficking in Birmingham, Solihull and Coventry primarily came from the children's social services unaccompanied minors teams. Coventry currently looks after very few separated asylum-seeking children (although there are separated asylum-seeking children living in Coventry who are supported by other local authorities in the area), therefore the concerns and issues raised in this report mainly reflect what is happening in Birmingham and Solihull.

Given that child trafficking is not an asylum issue it is very likely that, because of the clandestine nature of trafficking, many young people do not come to the attention of the authorities. Other trafficked young people may come to the UK with EEA passports, under private fostering arrangements, with false identification or avoid immigration control altogether. Therefore it is likely that the findings of this research reflect only the tip of the

iceberg in terms of the number of children and young people who have been trafficked and are living in Birmingham, Solihull and Coventry.

Another issue regarding research data is that while every attempt has been made to determine the accuracy of information, given the clandestine nature of child trafficking and inconsistencies in reporting and recording systems, the level and detail of information given by interviewees was variable. Therefore it is important to acknowledge that the data and case studies presented in this research provide indicative rather than conclusive evidence of the nature of child trafficking in the area.

4. The local context

Birmingham, Coventry and Solihull are clustered together in the West Midlands. Birmingham is England's second largest city, and has a population of approximately 1 million people. Coventry is England's eighth largest city, with a population of 305,000, and is situated 18 miles east of Birmingham. Solihull is a large and prosperous town nine miles south east of Birmingham. The borough has a population of 200,400 people.

Birmingham airport is the fifth largest airport in the UK, handling more than 9 million passengers per year. Its main routes are within Europe, Dubai and the sub-Indian continent. The area also lies at the centre of the UK's motorway network.¹²

Birmingham has a long history of receiving migrants, including asylum-seekers, and about 30 per cent of the population are from black and minority ethnic communities. Birmingham ranks second in the country after London in terms of the diversity of its population.¹³ Twenty-one per cent of Coventry's population are from minority ethnic backgrounds.¹⁴ Solihull is less ethnically diverse, with 10 per cent of its children coming from black and minority ethnic backgrounds.¹⁵

Birmingham and Coventry are dispersal areas for asylum-seekers under what was known at the time of the research as the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate of the Home Office. There were 1,700 asylum-seekers being supported under the NASS scheme in Birmingham and 740 in Coventry. Solihull is the base for one of the immigration teams being established under the New Asylum Model where accommodation will be provided to asylum-seekers. In September 2006 there were a total of 4,750 asylum-seekers in NASS accommodation in the West Midlands regions, with 610 asylum-seekers accessing subsistence-only support.¹⁶

Cases of child trafficking identified in the area tended to be of separated asylum-seeking children who are not dispersed by NASS, arrive in the area independently at immigration (such as at Birmingham airport), or present directly to local children's social services or voluntary sector agencies.

At the end of November 2006 there were 159, 96 and 11 separated asylum-seeking children supported by Birmingham, Solihull and Coventry children's social services departments respectively.¹⁷ The number of separated asylum-seeking children supported by Solihull is high because in 2002 the immigration services regional headquarters were situated in the area and therefore separated asylum-seeking children who presented at these headquarters were referred to Solihull local authority if they had no prior link to another area.¹⁸

5. Findings – evidence of child trafficking

Statutory authorities and voluntary agencies identified 32 children and young people who they believe may have been trafficked. This does not include concerns about an unknown number of young males from Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. Nor does it include concerns raised about a number of young people associated with private fostering arrangements, described below. The region has experienced cases (either suspected or confirmed) of

almost every type of child trafficking occurring in the UK, including working in a cannabis house, domestic servitude, working in the catering industry, sexual exploitation through prostitution, manual labour, and possible cases of benefit fraud. Debt bondage is suspected in some cases.

Nationality

The 32 children and young people involved came from 14 different countries. The breakdown is as follows: China (15), Vietnam (3), Uganda (1), Burundi (2), Somalia (1) Eritrea (1), Democratic Republic of Congo (3), Kosovo (1), Moldova (1), Russia (1) Bangladesh (3), Afghanistan (significant number but exact numbers unknown), India and Pakistan (numbers not known).

Age range

The vast majority of cases involved 16- and 17-year-olds (25 cases), the others involved one ten-year-old, four 13- to 14-year-olds, and one 15-year-old. In one case the exact age of the young person was unknown – they said they were under 18 but were assessed as being over 18 and consequently the authorities lost contact. There was another case (included in the age profile figures above) where a young person had arrived with false documentation claiming to be over 18 but it had since transpired that they were 17 years old.

Gender profile

The majority of cases of suspected or confirmed child trafficking involved females, with 24 young females and 8 young males identified. There was some evidence that young males and females were exploited in different ways. For example, cases of exploitation through manual labour involved young males only, whereas cases of domestic servitude involved only young females. Young females were more likely to be victims of sexual exploitation through prostitution. However, there was one case of a young male being sexually exploited through prostitution, which is counter to the common perception that prostitution exclusively involves exploitation of females.

Distinctions between age, gender and nationality

There are some distinctions between age, gender and nationality, and the purpose for which the child has been trafficked. For example, the young people brought into the region from Afghanistan were all aged 16 or younger, and were male without exception. The vast majority of Chinese children brought into the region have been female, and are generally aged 16 or above. Girls from a number of African countries were trafficked to the area for a range of purposes; only those over 16 were sexually exploited through prostitution, whereas the younger children were exploited for domestic servitude.

A word of caution

Although some trends are emerging regarding suspected child trafficking in the area, it is important to stress that these trends may change quickly. Therefore professionals who come into contact with suspected child trafficking victims should not become complacent about

general trends or what a typical profile of a trafficking victim might be. This could mean that cases of child trafficking where the children or young people involved do not fit the profile go undetected.

Sexual exploitation

Seven young people were identified as having been sexually exploited through being raped and/or involved in prostitution, as described below:

- A young female from China was found in Coventry following a police raid on a sauna.
- A 16- or 17-year-old Kosovan-Albanian female was prostituted by her cousin at a residential house provided by children's social services.
- A 17-year-old Ugandan female picked up by the police for possessing false documents said that she had been moved around the UK for two years, and had been kidnapped and raped. Children's social services suspected she had been sexually exploited through prostitution.
- Two young females from Burundi had very similar stories although they had come to the UK at different times. They had both gone missing from local authority care. Both made contact with the authorities some months later and stated that they had been drugged and raped – one talked of a 'boyfriend' and another man doing this. Both of the young women made contact with the authorities when they were pregnant – one had also contracted a sexually transmitted disease. Children's social services were treating the cases as sexual abuse at the time. However, there is a possibility that these young females may have been sexually exploited through prostitution. This links to findings in another area where research took place. Social workers there suspected that some young females from abroad only presented to social services when they were pregnant – and thus no longer useful to their abuser, trafficker and/or pimp – hence the suspicion of the females having been trafficked.
- A young female from Vietnam was found wandering the streets of Birmingham. Her story was not dissimilar to those above, as she talked of being held against her will by her 'boyfriend'. She was also pregnant when she came into contact with the authorities. There was a suspicion that she had been sexually exploited through prostitution in London, but she has not spoken of this to the authorities.
- One young male aged 17 informed the authorities that he had been trafficked into the sex industry in Spain. (See John's detailed case study.)

Alongside these cases, there is other evidence to back up suspicions of child trafficking for the purpose of prostitution in the area. Authorities have suspicions that young females from China who go missing from local authority care may be being sexually exploited through prostitution.

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) also raised concerns of suspected cases of sexual abuse of children from abroad, some of which may be occurring in private fostering arrangements – although whether this is associated with child trafficking is not clear.

Case study - John, age 17

John became separated from his family in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) due to the civil war. He has no idea whether they are still alive. Living on the streets, he was picked up by a man who took him into his home. After a while the man took him to the neighbouring country of Burundi where he was sexually abused within a sex trafficking network. At an initiation ceremony he was made to vow allegiance to the network and was threatened with death if he should run away. After a few months he was trafficked from Burundi to Spain where he was given a new identity as a 34-year-old man, with a new name and papers, and he was told what he should tell the authorities to claim asylum. John thought he was given an older identity so he would be able to work in gay clubs. In Spain he was sexually abused through prostitution with older men; he worked in gay bars but was not given any money himself. After about eight months he was trafficked to France where he was told not to claim asylum. He spent only one month there before being trafficked to England. He had known that men from the trafficking network would be waiting for him when he arrived. Once in London, one of the men was sympathetic to John's situation and helped him escape to Birmingham. The man was black African but not Congolese. He helped John claim asylum in a different name with a younger date of birth. During this time John did receive threatening emails from the trafficking network. John is 17 years old.

John was being housed in semi-supported accommodation by the local authority when he disclosed his story to a voluntary sector agency. His age was disputed by the Home Office and one week later he was collected by immigration at 6.30am and taken to the airport, where he was to be returned to Spain on a flight at 9.30am. While he was at the airport he called both the voluntary organisation and a solicitor, but neither was able to stop the process. The voluntary organisation called social services but they were unable to intervene.

The legal basis of John's return to Spain by the British immigration authorities was the Dublin II regulation.¹⁹ However, ECPAT UK contests that his removal under immigration control has placed him at even greater risk and is counter to all international obligations for the protection of victims of human trafficking, whether over or under 18 years of age.

Other types of exploitation

There were a number of other types of exploitation of young people who were known to have been or suspected of being trafficked to the area. Details of these are provided below.

Manual labour and debt bondage

Over the last 12 months, a high number (no specific figure given) of Afghan males aged between 14 and 16 have been brought into Birmingham, usually on the back of lorries.²⁰ According to reports, these young people arrive in waves, occurring about once every three

months. Each wave can include eight to ten new arrivals in a week. It is strongly suspected that they are being brought in under debt-bondage arrangements²¹ and are working in some form of manual labour.

In instances where they are identified and provided with support by children's social services, these children tend to go missing from care and emerge in the same Afghani area of Birmingham. All the young people who left care have since returned after being located in an area of Birmingham where there is an Afghan community.

All told similar stories along the lines of a maternal uncle having paid for their passage with no obligation of repayment. Most of these young people reportedly appear well adjusted and are attending some form of education, but all authorities involved have strong suspicions that they are working as manual labourers. These suspicions are largely due to indicators such as rough or dirty hands and tiredness being observed. The authorities in Birmingham, Coventry and Solihull are very concerned about this and the police and social services are monitoring the situation to determine whether exploitation is taking place.

Benefit fraud

There have been a number of Pakistani and Indian young males entering the region where benefit fraud has occurred.²² At this stage, there is no evidence of child trafficking, but social services are concerned, and local immigration authorities are watching the situation closely.

Drugs-related work

There was one case related to drugs. This involved a 13- or 14-year-old Vietnamese boy who was found working in a cannabis factory in a police raid. He was taken into children's social services care.

Domestic servitude

Two young people were identified as being exploited for domestic servitude in the UK. These two Congolese girls believed they were coming to the UK to be educated. They both escaped from the house where they were being held as servants and are now supported by children's social services. There was another case of a girl living in a refugee camp in Somalia who at the age of 10 or 11 had been taken to Uganda and exploited for domestic servitude there. She escaped from this family and on her arrival in the UK claimed asylum.

Catering trade

Two young females from China who went missing from children's social services care were found working illegally in the catering trade in London. Further investigation found that they had both come from the same orphanage in China and there had been suspicions about a Canadian-Chinese man who had funded this orphanage. This man had been involved in removing a number of girls from the orphanage over a period of time.

Alongside these cases, three young males from Bangladesh who claimed to be over 18 were identified at immigration as holding work permits for minimum wage employment in a restaurant. The eldest passed through immigration, although it later came to light that he was 17 years of age. The other two children were clearly very young and were found to be aged 10 and 14. They were placed into foster care but escaped shortly afterwards and were never heard from again (for more information on missing children, see the section below).

Missing children and young people

Of the 32 children and young people identified as having been trafficked or suspected of being trafficked, a high number (21) had gone missing from local authority care. Of these 21 cases, the vast majority (13) were Chinese – 10 female and 3 male. There were also two Bangladeshi boys and one Vietnamese boy who had gone missing; the other cases involved young females from Burundi, Uganda, Kosovo, Moldova and Russia. Of these 21 cases, only four young people have had contact with the authorities since they went missing. Therefore the authorities in the areas researched know of at least 17 young people from abroad who have gone missing over the last three years and have not been found.

Child trafficking is suspected in these cases for a number of reasons. First, in the case of five young females from China who went missing, they were identified at Birmingham International airport boarding a plane to Toronto with an adult who was wanted for human trafficking in Singapore. Second, a young female from China (who the local immigration service suspected of being trafficked and was subsequently held in detention at immigration) was contacted by a man who requested she be released. Immigration officials checked his name and discovered that he was suspected of being linked with the trafficking of young females through Heathrow. Third, in two of the cases where contact has been established with the young people since they went missing, they were found working illegally in the catering trade in London and had connections with a man who funded an orphanage in China.

Many of these young people went missing within 72 hours of their arrival in the UK, which suggests they had been given instructions prior to arrival and told to wait until someone contacted them before going missing from local authority care. However, there were also a number of cases where young people had gone missing long after they arrived. This could be due to a number of reasons: they ignored instructions given to them and stayed in care but eventually the ‘trafficker’ caught up with them; they were not originally trafficked but have been targeted by adults since their arrival who see them as vulnerable and easy to exploit – this is known as ‘internal child trafficking’ (see page 7); or they go missing for other unknown reasons.

Again, it is important to stress that even though some trends are emerging regarding children going missing in the area, these may change quickly and professionals should not become complacent about typical profiles or trends with regard to child trafficking.

Private fostering

Private fostering arrangements that involve a child being exploited are not easily detectable. If a child does not attend school, come into contact with a doctor, or contact children's social services, there is no way even to detect the child's presence in the country. This is of significant concern to children's social services in the region, and at this stage, there is no way to determine the extent of such cases.

This research identified two cases of cause for concern under private fostering arrangements.²³ These were:

- Two adults arrived with a baby with false documentation and were identified by immigration officers on arrival. It is suspected that the adults are not the parents of the baby. The baby was under the care of children's social services while investigations continued.
- Staff at a school where two girls from the Ivory Coast attended (aged 9 and 11) suspected that the woman they were living with was not their mother, as she claimed to be. The woman assaulted the children and she was charged with child cruelty. At this point a DNA test was done and the result indicated that she was not their mother. While there was evidence of abuse, there was no clear link made to child trafficking.

6. Responses to child trafficking

6.1 Awareness and identification

The fact that there is a significant range of possible child trafficking cases in Birmingham, Coventry and Solihull has resulted in relatively good awareness of the breadth of child trafficking among staff of the relevant agencies, primarily in unaccompanied minors teams in children's social services. Overall, however, anti-trafficking efforts in the region are in their infancy. There are a number of measures being taken to improve awareness and identification of young people who may have been trafficked:

- Children's social services are aware of the high number of young females from China who go missing on arrival. They are making additional efforts to monitor and protect these young women.
- There is significant interest in and commitment to developing and raising awareness among all participants in this research.
- The local immigration service is working with the LSCB to increase awareness about child trafficking and improve consistency of responses.
- Solihull has produced guidelines on 'Safeguarding Children from Abroad', which include a small section on child trafficking, with indicators to help identify possible victims of child trafficking. It also stresses that child protection procedures will always apply when there is a suspicion that a child has been trafficked.

Unfortunately, however, there was no mention of ‘Safeguarding Children from Abroad’ guidelines being produced in Birmingham or Coventry. See section 6.3 (page 20) on interagency work and the recommendations (page 21-24) for more information on this.

The research found that most front-line social workers in the unaccompanied minors teams and immigration staff had a good awareness of child trafficking. Front-line staff identified a number of cases where they had concerns about the possibility of child trafficking, and steps were taken to respond proactively to these concerns.

However, a key concern is that other teams in children’s social services do not have such a good awareness of child trafficking. The unaccompanied minors teams are not responsible for supporting young people in private fostering arrangements or supporting any other children from abroad who present at social services but do not claim asylum. These children and young people are the responsibility of other teams. The researcher tried to meet with representatives from general non-asylum children’s social services but there was no take-up. The concern is that because of a possible lack of awareness about child trafficking in these teams, young people they are responsible for who are trafficked are likely to go undetected.

All those who took part in this research were confident that their agencies could identify and respond to child trafficking cases adequately. However, it appears that awareness levels are person-specific and within the teams consulted, awareness levels varied. Moreover, it is likely that awareness is much lower among other agencies that were not available for consultation, including the education sector, the health service and the refugee agency voluntary sector. Participants highlighted the following concerns:

- Some schools have made referrals where they have concerns about students. However, these are often made on the basis of personal working relationships and there is no broader framework within which such referrals can take place, or be improved or expanded.
- Much more could be done at a strategic level by the health service to identify children and young people who may have been victims of child trafficking, particularly information around child pregnancies and sexual abuse, which could be shared without breaching patient-doctor confidentiality.

The research found limited evidence of conferences, seminars or training in the three areas on child trafficking or related issues. However, since the research was carried out training has been taken up in Solihull provided by ECPAT UK. Also, the Government Office for the West Midlands is funding a conference on child trafficking to coincide with the launch of this report.

The research found that awareness of child trafficking in the region is lacking in two key areas. First, there is a tendency to associate child trafficking with asylum issues. This is partly because most of the cases of possible child trafficking identified in the area are children who have applied for asylum as unaccompanied minors. However, professionals in all sectors need to be aware that child trafficking is not just related to asylum and although some young people who arrive in the UK may claim asylum, many others will not and will get through immigration undetected, perhaps coming in under private fostering

arrangements, on EEA passports, with false identification or avoiding immigration control altogether. Second, there is a tendency to associate child trafficking with sexual exploitation through prostitution. This research has demonstrated that child trafficking is associated not just with prostitution but with a whole range of exploitative work, including domestic servitude, cannabis house work, catering, benefit fraud and manual labour.

6.2 Support for suspected child trafficking victims

There is very little specialist support provided to young people who have been or are suspected of having been trafficked in the area. A major problem with providing specialist support is the lack of resources available. However, one unaccompanied minors team did decide to provide additional support to young females from China on arrival, given that a pattern was emerging whereby some of them were going missing soon after arrival. They were allocated to a housing agency that provided 24-hour surveillance. Yet even in this situation young people have still gone missing.

In one case, owing to a lack of specialist support available locally, a children's social services team referred a young female who had been trafficked for prostitution to the Poppy Project in London, which provides accommodation and support to adult females who have been trafficked. In this instance the young person went missing and has not been heard from since.

Apart from the example noted above regarding the young females from China, respondents did not highlight any specific package of support that is available to young people who are suspected of being trafficked. All separated asylum-seeking young people go through an assessment procedure that looks at issues such as vulnerability and mental and physical health, although these generic assessments may not meet the needs of trafficked children. A problem in this area, as in many others, is the lack of foster placements available for children and young people who are assessed as most vulnerable.

One problem highlighted by children's social services in providing support to young people who may have been trafficked was the difficulty in working with some young people from abroad due to significant cultural differences about the role of children in society. For example, one of the key obstacles identified in working with young people from Afghanistan is a lack of common understanding about what constitutes exploitation. Many young Afghan males are used to having adult responsibilities and feel frustrated in this country because they are restricted from doing things such as driving or getting married.

Another major concern raised by a number of people interviewed during this research was the role of the police in cases where child trafficking was suspected. A number of respondents said that the police were the least involved of all relevant agencies. They thought the police did not give sufficient attention to cases where children had gone missing with an adult while in the care of children's social services (where the suspicion is that the adult is an agent/trafficker), and that such cases were deemed low priority. The police participant in the research said that the possibility of child trafficking is considered in assessments of the vulnerability of a missing child, although there was no consistent approach across the three geographical areas and efforts were being made to improve this. Since the research took place a regional representative of the Association of Chief Police

Officers has been to speak to an interagency group on separated children about protocols and practice for dealing with missing children.

6.3 *Interagency work*

There is clear interest in the issue of child trafficking among unaccompanied minors teams in children's social services as well as local immigration officers in the area. Moreover, efforts are being made by the local government authority, children's social services, local immigration authorities and the LSCBs to progress multi-agency co-ordination.

The interagency groups that meet in the area and touch upon child trafficking issues are described below. These include:

- the LSCBs – as noted above, the immigration service is currently working through the boards to improve consistency of approach in local protocols and to enhance regional awareness on child trafficking and other issues.
- the missing persons sub-group of the Birmingham LSCB has started to discuss how it responds to the issue of child trafficking and there is potential that this could also be taken up within the sexual exploitation sub-group.
- the West Midlands Strategic Partnership for Asylum and Refugee Support has co-ordinated a multi-agency sub-group on separated children for several years. The partnership is seeking to broaden awareness of the needs of newly arrived children, particularly within the national development of children's services and safeguarding agenda. This partnership has also been involved in raising the awareness of the Government Office for West Midlands of safeguarding separated children and more broadly raising issues affecting children from abroad, including private fostering and trafficking.

All agencies directly involved in working with children, including social services, education services, the police and local immigration authorities, have reporting arrangements in place for generic referrals about child protection or concerns for children involved in illegal practices. For example, when a missing child is detected or criminal activity suspected, all agencies have robust reporting arrangements to the police. Also, where other agencies come into contact with vulnerable children, referrals to children's social services are prompt. There are, however, currently no guidelines for relevant statutory and voluntary agencies that may come into contact with child trafficking victims in two of the areas researched. The concern is that generic procedures will not be used in cases of child trafficking as they will be seen as 'different'.²⁴

There are also no established reporting procedures in place for actual or suspected cases of child trafficking between different social services teams in a particular local authority or between children's social services in the area.

Another problem regarding interagency work is that the police seem reluctant to involve social services in assessing vulnerability where a young person goes missing and is suspected victim of trafficking. The research found that respondents were unaware of any formal structures that enable children's social services or other agencies who have had contact with

the child to help the police assess vulnerability. As a consequence, some agencies feel the police are not giving cases of suspected child trafficking the priority they deserve.

See the recommendations below for suggestions on how to develop interagency work in Birmingham, Coventry and Solihull.

7. Conclusions

This report has found 32 separated children in Birmingham, Solihull and Coventry who have been or are suspected of having been being trafficked, 21 of whom have gone missing from local authority care. It is likely that given the clandestine nature of child trafficking, many other children and young people are being trafficked but go undetected, as they do not come into contact with statutory agencies.

Work to tackle child trafficking is gaining momentum in the area and this is a positive development. However, the responsibility for identifying victims of child trafficking should not just lie with a few front-line staff. It is important that awareness and identification of child trafficking increases in all agencies that come into contact with children from abroad. It is also essential that agencies, individually and collectively, plan for better identification and protection of suspected victims of child trafficking and that these plans fit within generic child protection procedures.

8. Recommendations

8.1 National Recommendation

A key finding in all three areas (Manchester, Newcastle and the West Midlands) is that children known to have been or suspected of having been trafficked need extra support which they do not currently get under the children's social services support framework. A key national recommendation is that children known to have been or suspected of having been trafficked should be given additional support through the appointment of a guardian who has a statutory duty to support the child in their legal, practical and emotional needs and who can advocate on their behalf. Refer to the national summary report 'Missing Out' for a full list of recommendations at a national policy level. This is available at <http://www.ecpat.org.uk/>

8.2 General recommendations

8.2.1 All agencies that have contact with children from abroad should ensure they develop awareness, identification and support systems to tackle child trafficking.

This is in line with the Common Assessment Framework currently being developed across the country. These agencies include: the health sector; education services; children's social services; local immigration services; the police; and voluntary agencies.

Each agency should aim to:

- identify named professionals with specific responsibility for leading the development of awareness, identification and support systems within their agency for victims of child trafficking

- receive training on child trafficking to increase awareness, identification of and support for victims of child trafficking
- cascade information on child trafficking to all staff within the agency who come into contact with children from abroad who may have been trafficked.
- actively participate in interagency activities/groups on child trafficking or related issues in the area, for example, the LSCB sub-group on missing children and the sub-group on sexual exploitation
- follow LSCB guidance (and in some areas help to develop such guidelines) when a child is suspected of being trafficked and make appropriate referrals to provide the necessary support
- develop internal protocols covering identification, support, recording and reporting of confirmed and suspected cases of child trafficking. These protocols should sit within generic child protection and other procedures; for example, they should reflect LSCB guidance on child protection and working with children from abroad, the Common Assessment Framework and Information Sharing Index.

8.2.2 Where appropriate these activities should be co-ordinated at a regional level, by relevant regional agencies including Government Office West Midlands, health and regional voluntary sector agencies, in order to ensure best practices are shared across the region.

8.3 Specific recommendations

These recommendations are not exhaustive and should be considered as examples of how to develop a more comprehensive local strategy to identify, increase awareness of and support for victims of child trafficking in the area. Help in developing such a strategy should also be taken from national guidance on child trafficking.²⁵

8.3.1 Local Safeguarding Children Boards

The LSCBs should take the lead in developing prevention, identification and support to victims of suspected child trafficking. Specifically:

- The LSCB should be the central point to record suspected and confirmed cases of child trafficking to ensure that trafficking is dealt with consistently and effectively across the region, sharing patterns, indicators and good practice.
- Local authorities should consider employing a specialist child protection officer in each area who has expertise and takes the lead in dealing with children from abroad.
- The LSCB should take the lead in interagency co-ordination. They should bring in the refugee and asylum bodies that are developing work in this area but also open it up to other agencies that may come across victims of child trafficking beyond asylum work.
- Each LSCB should develop procedures on ‘Safeguarding Children from Abroad’ which include information on child trafficking (at the time of the research only)

Solihull had specific child protection procedures for children from abroad). In all areas, the ACPC guidelines, which have now been taken on by the LSCB, need to be amended to ensure that procedures are in place to deal with cases of suspected or confirmed child trafficking. These should include information and guidance on what to do in the case of a missing separated asylum-seeking child. Information from this research should be used to help develop indicators to identify victims of child trafficking and these should be updated regularly to reflect current trends. The guidance should also cover how to record, share information on, and refer cases of young people who are suspected victims of child trafficking.

- Awareness of child trafficking needs to be raised across agencies, including health and education services, the local immigration service, children's social services, the voluntary sector, and the police. It should be emphasised that child trafficking is not an asylum issue. Awareness-raising needs to include information about the possible routes through which children can be trafficked, including through private fostering arrangements, children and young people who go undetected at immigration (as they enter the UK legally) or through children's social services as separated asylum-seeking children. It should also include the range of exploitative work that children and young people are trafficked for to dispel the myth that children are trafficked solely for sexual exploitation through prostitution. More generalised training on safeguarding children could incorporate specific information on child trafficking.
- Ensure information about child trafficking is included in Children and Young People's Plans. This will ensure that senior management take responsibility for anti-trafficking activities in the area and that child trafficking is an important consideration for all those who come into contact with children who may have been trafficked.

8.3.2 *Children's social services*

A strategy for supporting victims of child trafficking should be developed within children's social services, which includes accommodation, support and protection for young people. It should tackle the following issues:

- Safe accommodation, as well as specialist foster placements, be provided according to the level of support and protection needed by the individual child.
- All social services teams should have a good awareness of child trafficking, in particular of trafficking through: private fostering arrangements; young people who are here on EEA passports; and other children from abroad who avoid detection at immigration. All children's social services teams could learn from the experience of the unaccompanied minors team, although reliance on this team to deal with all trafficked children should be avoided because, as has already been noted, child trafficking is not an asylum issue.
- Young people who are trafficked should be dealt with under the generic child protection procedures; those that go missing while in local authority care should be

dealt with under the protocol for missing children. This ensures that children who are trafficked are considered as children first and foremost and child protection issues are seen as paramount. However, it is important to review these procedures to ensure they cover all aspects of what to do in a case of suspected child trafficking. 'Safeguarding Children from Abroad' guidelines should be complementary to generic child protection procedures and guidance.

- Internal procedures within children's social services teams need to be developed to ensure that information about suspected child trafficking cases is shared across teams. Sharing information between social services teams across the region is also important. Generic children's services currently being developed such as the Information Sharing Index may well provide opportunities for improvements in sharing information on child trafficking cases. Improved communication will help children's social services keep up to date with current child trafficking patterns and will be a good opportunity to share good practice.

Appendix 1

List of agencies consulted

1. Save the Children Birmingham
2. Coventry social services
3. West Midlands Strategic Partnership for Asylum and Refugee Support
4. Birmingham social services
5. Principal Housing Care
6. Asylum Support and Immigration Resource Team (ASIRT)
7. Solihull social services
8. Immigration service
9. Police
10. Childline

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- 'Safeguarding Children from Abroad Guidance and Safeguarding Children', Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
- 'Solihull's Children and Young People's Plan 2006-2010', Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council, March 2006
- United Nations (2000) 'United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children'

¹ In sharp contrast to the rigorous standards now being applied to children looked after by local authorities, the current system only requires birth parents and foster carers to notify the local authority of a private fostering arrangement and for the local authority to carry out basic checks and to maintain contact with the child and carer. Only in an extreme case can the carer be declared an unfit person to foster. It is well known, and accepted, that only a very small proportion of private foster carers notify local authorities at all. Private fostering remains an underground activity, and the current unsatisfactory situation has continued for many years.

² 'Cause for Concern? London Social Services and Child Trafficking', ECPAT UK, 2004

³ 'Missing Out: A Study of Child Trafficking in the North-West, North-East and West Midlands', ECPAT UK, January 2007

⁴ For example, another definition is in the EU Council Framework Decision on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings

⁵ United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, 2000 ⁵

⁶ *Ibid*

⁷ 'Cause for Concern?' *Op cit*

⁸ 'Meeting the needs of sexually exploited young people in London', Barnardo's, 2005

⁹ *Ibid*

¹⁰ Joint Committee on Human Rights, Human Trafficking, Twenty-sixth Report of Session 2005-06, Volume 1, pp 14-18

¹¹ ILPA, 'Child First, Migrant Second: Ensuring that every child matters', 2006, p 54

¹² <http://www.bhx.co.uk/>, accessed on 27 November 2006

¹³ Birmingham's Children and Young People's Plan 2006-2010, Feb 2006

¹⁴ Coventry's Children and Young People's Plan 2006-2010, Draft Jan 2005

¹⁵ Solihull's Children and Young People's Plan 2006-2010, March 2006

¹⁶ Interagency Partnership Newsletter, November 2006

¹⁷ Statistics of numbers of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children by local authority, November 2006

¹⁸ Solihull's Children and Young People's Plan, 2006-2010, March 2006

¹⁹ Under the Dublin II regulation, individuals fleeing persecution can be forced to claim asylum in the first EU country they arrived in, even though a person's chances of being recognised as a refugee vary considerably across European countries. ECRE Report 2004, www.ecre.org

²⁰ These cases are not included in the total figure of 32 young people who have been identified by authorities as possibly having been trafficked, as the number of young people were not provided in the research.

²¹ This is where the trafficker pays for the victim's expenses for travel, accommodation, etc, and then demands this money back from the victim (which they pay for through their labour). However, the 'debt' is usually far higher than the actual costs and impossible for the victim to pay back, no matter how hard they work.

²² These cases are not included in the total figure of 32 young people who have been identified by authorities as possibly having been trafficked, as the number of young people were not provided in the research and there was no clear indication of child trafficking.

²³ These cases are not included in the total figure of 32 young people who have been identified by authorities as possibly having been trafficked, as there was no evidence that they had been trafficked.

²⁴ Solihull has 'Safeguarding Children from Abroad' guidance and 'Safeguarding Children/Young People who are Sexually Exploited by Prostitution' – see www.solihull.gov.uk

²⁵ Current guidance includes: the Trafficking Toolkit; the DfES 'Working Together to Safeguard Children' report; and government guidance on safeguarding trafficked children, which is being published in March 2007.