

Child trafficking in Newcastle

A report on the evidence and agency responses to child
trafficking

March 2007



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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 Newcastle; second, the levels of awareness of child trafficking; and third, how children's social services and other relevant 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 Birmingham, Coventry and Solihull, and Manchester. Interviews were conducted with representatives from children's social services, the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB), the police, local immigration agencies, an immigration lawyer and key voluntary sector agencies working to support children.

The evidence of child trafficking presented in this report primarily comes from the children's social services team responsible for supporting separated children who are seeking asylum. It is probable 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 Newcastle. 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.

Children's social services and other agencies in Newcastle identified 16 children and young people as possibly having been trafficked. All but one case included in this report occurred between March 2005 and May 2006. The other case was uncovered in 2004.

These children and young people were suspected of being exploited in a number of ways. For example, a pattern identified by children's social services is the number of Somali girls (seven) who have gone missing from care; the strong suspicion is that they have been brought to the UK for the purpose of under-age forced marriage. Another concern is the number of Chinese young people (at least six) who have gone missing from care. Enquiries about three of these young people resulted in child trafficking-related charges being made¹ against three men. The children remained missing at the time of the research.

Other types of child trafficking identified by children's social services and other agencies include the trafficking of a boy for prostitution to another European country, who subsequently escaped to Newcastle, and a girl who divulged to a community police officer that she had been mistreated and involved in domestic servitude for a family in London. She was mistakenly dispersed to Newcastle as an adult.

A major concern about these children and young people is that the vast majority – 13 out of 16 – have gone missing while under the care of children's social services. This is often the trigger for the authorities to suspect they have been trafficked. These 13 children and young people are still missing.

Alongside cases of separated children suspected of being trafficked in Newcastle, concerns were also raised during the research about vulnerable children in private fostering arrangements, where abuse has taken place². Other local research has highlighted concerns of child trafficking under private fostering arrangements.³

There are a range of very positive developments in Newcastle to increase awareness and identification of victims of suspected child trafficking. One key measure is the setting up of a multi-agency child trafficking group. Another is that the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) is proactively involved in the development of anti-trafficking measures. Also, the involvement of the local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) with the social services unaccompanied minors team provides much-needed professional assessment and support for young people's mental health needs.

There are, however, a number of concerns regarding measures to tackle child trafficking, and the number of young people going missing from children's social services care raises particular concerns about identification and protection of young people on arrival in the UK. There is no safe accommodation to house young people who have been trafficked or are at risk of being trafficked in the area, and there are no specially trained foster carers to take on children who are suspected of being trafficked.

To tackle these concerns, this report sets out a series of recommendations aimed at relevant agencies, including the LSCB, children's social services, the police, education services and the health service (see pages 18-21).

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 2004.⁴ 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 the trafficking of children and young people in a number of locations in England. Research was also carried out in Birmingham, Solihull, Coventry and Manchester. There is also a summary report which pulls together the findings of all of the research and sets it in the context of current national policy debates on child trafficking.⁵

The objectives of this research were as follows:

- 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, and 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.⁶ 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).”⁷

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.”⁸

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 this is different from trafficking because on arrival the smugglers have no intent to exploit those they are moving.

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 child 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,⁹ and there are certainly no reliable statistics. What we do know can be gleaned from research carried out with children's social services and other service providers, and evidence from police operations such as Operation Pentameter.

In 2004, ECPAT UK published '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 children were being trafficked not just for sexual exploitation through prostitution but also for 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 of age in domestic servitude, often hidden 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's¹⁰ 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 66.¹¹

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. Despite this focus on women, at least 12 girls 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 trafficking.¹² There are also an increasing number of national laws against 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: the 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, that they should be provided with security, stability and be cared for.¹³ 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 statutory bodies that replace Area Child Protection Committees (ACPCs) under the Children Act 2004. They are highly 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 interviews with ten individuals who are involved in child trafficking issues in Newcastle. Five of the interviews were with individuals and two were in small groups. Representatives from children's social services, the LSCB, the police, a lawyer specialising in immigration, and key voluntary sector agencies were interviewed.

The face-to-face interviews explored questions relating to the objectives of the research, which are described above on page 6 (section 2.1). Four people were also interviewed by telephone using semi-structured interview guidelines. These interviewees were from voluntary sector agencies, which helped broaden the sample. Carrying out telephone interviews after the face-to-face interviews also helped validate and build upon the findings.

Interviews were conducted in Newcastle during May and June 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. All but one case was identified in the period between March 2005 and May 2006 – the other case identified was in 2004.

A gap highlighted by the researcher was the inability to identify anyone working in education who was informed about child trafficking in Newcastle. Also, a representative from the health sector was not available for interview during the research period.

Information on child trafficking in Newcastle primarily came from the children's social services unaccompanied minors team, complemented by data from other statutory agencies and voluntary organisations. However, given that child trafficking is not an asylum issue it is very likely, because of the clandestine nature of trafficking, that 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 Newcastle.

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 Newcastle.

4. The local context

Newcastle is situated in the north-east of England and has a population of 266,000, with approximately 64,000 young people. It is considered the regional capital.¹⁴ It has an international airport that handles over 5 million passengers.¹⁵

Minority ethnic communities make up 6.9 per cent of the population and there is increasing ethnic diversity within the city's population, with strong Pakistani (1.9 per cent), Indian (1.2 per cent) Bangladeshi (1 per cent) and Chinese (0.7 per cent) communities.¹⁶

Newcastle is a dispersal area 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. According to statistics around the time of the research, there were 1,125 asylum-seekers being supported by NASS in the area.¹⁷

There were approximately 100 separated asylum-seeking children being supported by Newcastle children's social services at the time of the research. Separated asylum-seeking children were not dispersed by NASS but arrived in Newcastle independently either at immigration (such as at Newcastle airport or the local immigration office), or presented directly to children's social services or a refugee agency in the area.

Concerns that children were being trafficked in the area arose in 2003 when a number of young people went missing from social services care, one of whom went missing shortly after disclosing that she had been raped, prostituted and abused. An interagency group was set up following these incidences and policies and procedures have been developed to deal with potential cases of child trafficking.

5. Findings – evidence of child trafficking

Children's social services and other agencies identified 16 young people who may have been trafficked. These include cases where there have been convictions relating to trafficking,¹⁹ and concerns about children being trafficked for under-age forced marriages. This figure does not include concerns about a young person in a private fostering arrangement who was abused, as it was not clear if this was a case of child trafficking or not (see the private fostering case on page 12).

Nationality, age and gender

The majority of young people identified as possibly having been trafficked come from China (seven) and Somalia (seven) – the other young people's nationalities were not provided. The seven young people from Somalia were all under 16 but their specific ages were not given,

five young people were 16 or 17, and one was 15 years old. In the other cases their ages were not known.

The vast majority of cases involved females (12), with only one identified case of a male being trafficked and three cases where gender was not provided. All the cases of possible trafficking for under-age forced marriage involved females. The only clear case of trafficking for sexual exploitation through prostitution involved a young male, which is counter to the common perception that prostitution exclusively involves females.

Although some trends are emerging regarding suspected child trafficking in Newcastle it is important to stress that these trends may change quickly. Therefore professionals who come into contact with victims of suspected child trafficking should not become complacent about general trends or what a typical profile of a trafficking victim might be. This could lead to too little attention being given to young people who do not fit the profile. If attention is focused primarily on one particular group of young people and victims of child trafficking are identified who fit this profile, there may be a tendency to keep the focus on this particular group while the trafficking of other children and young people not considered at high risk goes undetected.

Types of child trafficking

Young people suspected of being trafficked may be exploited in a number of ways. There may be a range of other exploitative practices that young people are involved in; however, the cases described below are the ones that children's social services and other agencies participating in this research know of or have strong suspicions about.

Under-age forced marriage

A pattern that children's social services have identified is the number of females from Somalia who go missing from care and the strong suspicion that they have been brought to the UK for the purpose of under-age forced marriage. Children's social services believed that these young people were aware of what was going to happen and did not want to go, thus it is possible that they were being forced into the marriages. It was suspected that a total of seven Somali females under 16 years of age have been trafficked for this purpose.

These young people all belong to the Bajuni clan, a minority group in Somalia who have traditionally held low status. Many Bajuni fled to Kenya in the early 1990s during civil unrest and settled there. Historically the Bajuni were treated as an underclass or slave labour but more recently have suffered due to economic exclusion. The arrival of Somali separated children, especially Banjuni clan females, is an area that must be further investigated in the light of under-age forced marriage. See the recommendation on page 19.

Exploitation through prostitution

One boy from West Africa was sexually abused and worked as a slave in a country in West Africa. This boy, with the support of a local church, was helped to escape to a European country, but the 'agent' facilitating his escape – a European national – abused him. He was

also abused by other men and was forced into prostitution in a European country. He was 16 years old at the time. He claimed asylum in a European country, but after his asylum claim failed, the 'agent' brought him to Newcastle where he was abandoned. This young person was supported by Newcastle children's social services who assessed him as having serious mental health problems. Nevertheless he was sent back to the European country he had first arrived in and claimed asylum under the immigration rule 'Dublin II'.²⁰

Domestic servitude

A 16-year-old girl (nationality not known) had been abandoned in London after having been involved in domestic servitude for a family who mistreated her. She sought support from NASS (specific details of how or why are not known) and was dispersed to Newcastle. A police officer in Newcastle spotted the girl and referred her to children's social services. She has since been supported as a vulnerable person under 18.

Other concerns

Children's social services also have concerns about six Chinese young people who have gone missing. In one particular incident, three Chinese females (one aged 15 and two aged 16) arrived at Newcastle airport on false Japanese documents which they destroyed on the plane. A children's social services support worker and community relations police officer had concerns about these girls, particularly because of their sophisticated clothes and hairstyles. Even though the social services support worker felt that these young people needed to be somewhere with 24-hour staffing, they were placed in emergency accommodation as there were no foster placements available. The three young people went missing after two days – they had gone to meet a man. This man was identified by the police and subsequently three men have been charged and sentenced for offences related to child trafficking with regards to other young females from China.²¹

Children's social services also had concerns about a 16-year-old Chinese girl who they suspected of being trafficked. She had told them that her journey from China had taken three months and she had been raped during this time.

Private fostering

Alongside suspected cases of separated asylum-seeking children being trafficked in Newcastle, concerns were also raised about vulnerable children in private fostering arrangements. The case below was provided during the research and although it is not a confirmed child trafficking case, it highlights concerns about the hidden nature of some private fostering arrangements and the vulnerability of children in these situations.

In January 2005 a very young child from Nigeria (under four years old) was found to have been physically abused by her carer. The young girl had been brought over to the UK by a church minister and was handed over to a woman who was not her mother. A health visitor who was visiting the family regarding another child initially raised concern. Subsequently the young child started going to nursery because of the health visitor's intervention and the nursery raised concerns about the child being physically abused. The carer was charged with assault and neglect of the child.

Other recent research carried out by The Children's Society on children in African refugee communities in Newcastle has highlighted concerns about private fostering arrangements and links to child trafficking.²²

Children going missing

A significant number of the separated young people who children's social services had concerns about went missing from social services care (13 out of 16 in the period covered). A young person going missing has often been the trigger for suspecting that he or she has been trafficked. One emerging issue about these missing young people is that a significant number (six) are Chinese and aged between 15 and 17 years old. Clear links are being made between these young people and child trafficking, as noted above. Another pattern that children's social services have identified in relation to separated asylum-seeking children going missing is the number of girls from Somalia who go missing from care. As noted above, these young people are suspected of being brought to the UK for the purpose of under-age forced marriage.

It is important to reiterate that even though some trends are emerging regarding children going missing in Newcastle, these may change quickly and professionals should not become complacent about typical profiles or trends.

6. Responses to child trafficking

6.1 Awareness and identification

There are a number of very positive developments in Newcastle to tackle awareness and identification of child trafficking:

6.1.1 The LSCB is overseeing the development of anti-trafficking measures and has been keen to find out more about child trafficking. They have supported this research and other research being carried out by The Children's Society to explore how to safeguard the needs of African children in Newcastle. The findings of both will be used by the LSCB to develop more effective anti-trafficking measures, and the findings of this report will feed into a joint action plan on sexual exploitation, missing from placement and child trafficking.²³

6.1.2 An interagency child trafficking group has been established. Included in its terms of reference are: education and awareness-raising; carrying out joint training; and reviewing information collected on incidence rates and the impact of any local initiatives. Clearly these aims help with awareness-raising and identification of child trafficking cases in the area.

6.1.3 The Newcastle ACPC document 'Safeguarding Children and Young People from Abroad' (May 2005) includes: a small number of indicators to identify child trafficking victims; procedures on dealing with child trafficking victims; private fostering policies and procedures; and good practice in working with children from abroad. It also includes a list of questions that carers/potential carers should be asked.

6.1.4 There are a number of good practice examples where professionals who have come into contact with young people have been vigilant and been able to identify vulnerable young people and follow appropriate channels. These cases highlight the importance of all professionals who come into contact with young people having an awareness of child trafficking issues, and the importance of good interagency work. It is particularly important to be able to identify young people who do not have contact with children's social services, such as in the case of the young person noted on page 12 who was being treated as an adult by NASS. It was through the vigilance of a police officer in Newcastle that this young person was identified as young and vulnerable and referred to children's social services. Also the case noted on page 12 where it was the health visitor and nursery staff who raised concerns about a young child who was in a private fostering arrangement and was being abused.

6.1.5 The local authority has a clear position on under-age forced marriage, which is provided in the Newcastle ACPC guidance, and it states: "forced marriage is a human rights abuse... The United Nations considers it a form of trafficking, sexual slavery and exploitation."²⁴

6.1.6 CAMHS is closely involved with the children's social services unaccompanied minors team. The CAMHS worker is part of the unaccompanied minors team. The worker assesses the young person's mental health needs on arrival, identifies appropriate interventions, and refers the young person to the appropriate service, as well as being available on a daily basis for follow-up as necessary. This service recognises the emotional and mental health issues that separated young people could be dealing with, and provides a vital support for them.

The findings of this research highlight a number of concerns about the identification and awareness of child trafficking. These are:

- The number of young people going missing while in the care of children's social services raises concerns about identification and protection of young people on arrival.
- The guidelines 'Safeguarding Children and Young People from Abroad' are a very positive development in trying to tackle child trafficking in Newcastle. However, there are a number of additions which would make the guidance more useful, and these are detailed on page 18 in the recommendations section.
- A number of participants in this research raised concerns that child traffickers may be aware of social work procedures and use them to work in their favour. For example, if young people arrive at the weekend and claim asylum they are placed in emergency bed & breakfast (B&B) accommodation until Monday when a social worker can do an assessment. Six young people from China are known to have gone missing from emergency B&B accommodation.
- Aside from the unaccompanied minors team, it is not clear that other children's social services teams have a good awareness of child trafficking issues. Given that

children in private fostering arrangements and other children from abroad who are not separated asylum-seeking children do not come under the remit of the unaccompanied minors team, this is an area that requires further exploration.

6.2 *Support for suspected child trafficking victims*

Separated asylum-seeking children are supported by an unaccompanied minors team within children's social services. As noted above, a welcome approach taken by Newcastle children's social services is the emphasis on mental health, with a dedicated mental health worker who carries out an assessment of separated children on arrival.

There is no safe accommodation, including specialist foster care, to house young people who are at risk of or have been trafficked in the area. Many separated asylum-seeking children currently live in shared housing and one participant was concerned about whether this was an appropriate place to put young people at risk of going missing, suggesting instead that supported housing would be more appropriate. Participants in the research raised the problem of lack of resources to provide appropriate support for victims of suspected child trafficking.

The local authority does recognise separated young people who go missing as 'missing persons' rather than 'absconders from local authority care' (where a young person leaves of their own free will). A missing child will be reported to the "Police and Immigration Department immediately"²⁵ and interagency procedures in respect of missing children/young people should be applied.

6.3 *Interagency work*

Indications are that interagency work on child trafficking is developing in a positive way; for example, the interagency responsibility for following procedures in the 'Safeguarding Children from Abroad' guidance noted above. This is also evidenced through the development of an interagency group on child trafficking.

There are, however, a number of areas that could be developed to enhance anti-trafficking activities. For example, the interagency group is open to agencies supporting separated asylum-seeking children who have concerns about child trafficking. Invitees include police, local immigration authorities, children's social services, the LSCB, Save the Children and The Children's Society. As noted in the recommendations on page 18, this should be opened up to agencies that come into contact with any children who may have been trafficked.

There is some evidence that other statutory agencies, apart from children's social services, are taking responsibility in identifying those at risk of child trafficking or other child protection issues. The examples of the health visitor, nursery and police officer noted above are an indication of this. However, it is not possible to say whether all professionals who come into contact with potential trafficking victims are aware of ways to help identify suspected cases, or whether the people noted above are the exception rather than the rule. One participant in the research did note the absence of the local education authority playing a role in interagency work on anti-trafficking. Staff working in schools and colleges can play a key role in identifying child protection concerns, including concerns about young people

being trafficked. Another participant was concerned about police involvement in child trafficking work and that two officers who had been very much involved in both asylum/refugee and anti-trafficking initiatives have since moved on and not been replaced.

Another concern about interagency work is the persistent problem of immigration matters taking precedence over that of the child's best interest. An example of this is described in the 'evidence of child trafficking' section on page 10. This is where a young person with serious mental health problems was returned to another European country under the Dublin II regulation. Children's social services had concerns that this young person may become a victim of child trafficking again in the country he was being returned to, yet these concerns were not taken into account in the decision to remove the young person. Clearly, in this case immigration rules took precedence over considerations of what was in the best interests of a very vulnerable young person. A number of participants in this research mentioned the lack of support from immigration authorities in their work, although acknowledging that there were some signs of improvement.

7. Conclusions

This report has found that a significant number of separated asylum-seeking children in Newcastle have been or are suspected of being trafficked, the majority of whom have gone missing from local authority care. It is likely that many other children and young people who are not coming into contact with statutory agencies are trafficked but go undetected, including children and young people in private foster care arrangements who come to the UK with EEA passports or with false identification or avoid immigration control altogether.

Local statutory and voluntary agencies are working hard to increase awareness and identification of suspected child trafficking victims. However, the number of young people suspected of being trafficked and going missing from local authority care is of serious concern. The responsibility for identifying victims of child trafficking should not just lie with a few front-line workers. 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 victims of suspected 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.

8.3 *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 child trafficking victims in Newcastle. Help in developing such a strategy should also be taken from national guidance on child trafficking.²⁶

8.3.1 The Local Safeguarding Children Board. The LSCB should continue to take the lead in developing prevention, identification and support systems for victims of suspected child trafficking. It should ensure the following:

- The ‘Safeguarding Children and Young People from Abroad’ guidance should be amended to include more regionally specific trends in child trafficking. Developing indicators that identify children and young people in the early days before they go missing is crucial. These indicators should be regularly updated to reflect the current situation and remain useful in identifying child trafficking victims. It would also be useful to categorically state in the guidance that generic child protection guidelines apply to young people who have been or are suspected of being trafficked, to ensure they are not treated as exceptional cases that fall outside of the guidelines. The guidance should also include information on how to record, share and refer cases of young people who are suspected of being trafficked. All relevant agencies should sign up to these guidelines and receive training on how to adhere to them.
- Newcastle local authority should consider employing a specialist child protection officer with expertise in dealing with children from abroad (this could be a key recommendation in the action plan produced on the three issues currently under review at the LSCB, namely: sexual exploitation, missing from placement and child trafficking). This will ensure that child protection takes precedence over all other issues and will tackle head on the problem of immigration matters taking precedence over child welfare.
- The LSCB should provide/organise training to raise awareness and confidence about child trafficking for a range of professionals, including those working for the police, children’s social services, the local education authority, health workers and the voluntary sector.
- The interagency group, currently led by Save the Children, should become part of the LSCB’s remit. The group should be opened up to all agencies who may come into contact with child trafficking victims, including health and education services and other children’s services teams, as well as the unaccompanied minors team. Representatives from all relevant agencies should attend, including the police and local immigration representatives. The remit of the group should also be expanded from looking specifically at separated asylum-seeking children to incorporating other children and young people who may fall victim to trafficking, including those in private fostering arrangements and other young people who go undetected at immigration (as they arrive legally) and never have contact with children’s social services. The aims of the group should be reviewed after these changes have been

implemented to take on board the broader remit of the group and ensure clarity about the aims and objectives. The group should also agree on a name which clearly reflects its purpose.

8.3.2 *Children's social services*

Children's social services should develop a strategy for supporting young people who are suspected of being trafficked, including safe accommodation, support and protection. It should tackle the following issues:

- Safe accommodation, as well as specialist private foster placements, be provided according to the level of support and protection needed by the individual child.
- Any young person suspected of being trafficked should be placed in 24-hour supervised accommodation, to help ensure they remain within the care of social services. Young people should be made aware in a culturally sensitive way of the concerns that children's social services have about them being trafficked and they should be informed of their rights.
- Children's social services need to consider how to tackle the problem of young people going missing at the weekend. For example, staff could be on duty over the weekend to carry out assessments on arrival and make appropriate placement decisions. Alternatively temporary specialist foster care placements could be set up where young people could be placed over the weekend prior to a thorough assessment being carried out, to help ensure they do not go missing at this time.
- All children's 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. The reliance on expertise in the unaccompanied minors team should be avoided, as child trafficking is not an asylum issue.
- Children's social services should ensure that social workers have a good understanding of traditions within the cultures of young people they are supporting. For example, social services should, as they have shown a desire to do, find out more about the traditions and culture of the Bajuni tribe in Somalia in order to develop a more effective strategy to prevent Somali girls from going missing and being forced into under-age marriage.

8.3.2 *Police*

Newcastle police should develop a local strategy to tackle child trafficking in the area and should reinstate a dedicated police officer to work on child trafficking issues. As far as possible, there should be a consistent point of contact within the police on child trafficking

issues. This officer would raise awareness of child trafficking within the police force, and would be the police representative in interagency activities on child trafficking in Newcastle.

The Police Regional Intelligence Unit based within Durham Police HQ should develop links and liaise with the Newcastle Multi-Agency Trafficking Group and the LSCB on immigration, trafficking and prostitution issues.

8.3.4 Local immigration service

The local immigration service should nominate an officer to liaise with children's social services, the police and other relevant agencies on child trafficking issues. This person would also represent the immigration service in interagency activities, including the interagency meeting on child trafficking in Newcastle.

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¹ The three men were prosecuted under immigration offences.

² 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.

³ 'Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children in the African Refugee Community in Newcastle', The Children's Society, June 2006, p 33

⁴ 'Cause for Concern? London Social Services and Child Trafficking', ECPAT UK, 2004

⁵ 'Missing Out: A Study of Child Trafficking in the North-West, North-East and West Midlands', ECPAT UK, January 2007

⁶ For example, another definition is the one included in the EU Council Framework Decision on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings

⁷ United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, 2000 ⁷

⁸ *Ibid*

⁹ ECPAT UK (2004), *op cit*

¹⁰ 'Meeting the needs of sexually exploited young people in London', Barnardo's, 2005

¹¹ *Ibid*

¹² See pages 14-18 Joint Committee on Human Rights, Human Trafficking, Twenty-sixth Report of Session 2005-06, Volume 1

¹³ ILPA (2006) Child first, migrant second: Ensuring that every child matters, p 54

¹⁴ Newcastle Plan for Children and Young People April 2006-April 2009, p 12

¹⁵ <http://www.newcastleairport.com/Corporate/airporthistory.htm>, accessed on 25 November 2006

¹⁶ Newcastle Plan for Children and Young People April 2006-April 2009, p 12

¹⁷ Supported with accommodation and subsistence. IAP Newsletter, September 2006

¹⁸ Newcastle Plan for Children and Young People April 2006-April 2009, p 13

¹⁹ The three men were prosecuted under immigration offences.

²⁰ 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

²¹ The three men were prosecuted under immigration offences.

²² 'Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children in the African Refugee Community in Newcastle', The Children's Society, June 2006, p 33

²³ Local Safeguarding Children Board Business Plan 2006-09

²⁴ 'Forced Marriage: Safeguarding Children and Young People', Regional Interagency Procedures, Newcastle Area Child Protection Committee, May 2005

²⁵ 'Safeguarding Children and Young People from Abroad', North East Children, Regional Interagency Procedures, May 2005

²⁶ 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