

Still at risk

A review of support for trafficked children

September 2013



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REFUGEES



The
Children's
Society

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Executive summary

Introduction

This report presents the findings from a short, small scale Home Office funded scoping review of the practical care and safeguarding arrangements for trafficked children, and those who may have been trafficked, who are in the local authority care system. Specifically the aims of the review were to:

- 1 Assess the experiences of children identified as trafficked or suspected trafficked and accommodated in local authority care
- 2 Assess mechanisms in place to support trafficked or suspected trafficked children and the role of social workers, Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) and other professionals mapped as having had contact with the child in providing and accessing care appropriate for them
- 3 Assess the multi-agency response in the context of best practice in child protection and safeguarding as set out in the Home Office/Department for Education – Safeguarding Children who may have been Trafficked Guidance
- 4 Identify good practice and areas for improvements.

For the purposes of this scoping review, the agreed definition of trafficked children is children who have been trafficked, and are now outside their country of origin.

Methodology

A multi-method approach was undertaken in order to gain both breadth and depth of information. Existing research, legislation and policy guidance were reviewed in the early stages of the project to place this new research in context. We conducted:

- Qualitative in-depth interviews with 17 children and young people identified as trafficked or suspected of being trafficked
- An online survey sent to Directors of Children’s Services in every local authority in England which achieved responses from 52 local authorities (a 32 per cent response rate)
- Telephone interviews with 18 key stakeholders, social care managers and front line social workers), two solicitors (one welfare and one immigration) and seven representatives from the voluntary sector.

An online survey similar to that sent to Directors of Children’s Services was also sent to a sample of 30 Heads of Local Safeguarding Children’s Boards (LSCB). Unfortunately only five responses were received so we were unable to use the data in the report.

Towards the end of the review, a small expert stakeholder seminar was held to discuss emerging findings. Representatives from across local authorities, the voluntary sector and the legal

profession attended and some of the discussion and examples from this seminar feature in the report.

Research findings

This report has drawn upon the experiences of children themselves and some of those that have a role in their care, and has identified ways of working that can help to provide effective support, but also highlights where practice and policy can be improved.

Discovery and identification of trafficked children

Trafficked children can have very little opportunity to escape their traffickers and exploiters. They do not have a clear understanding of what is happening to them, or knowledge of their rights and sources of support available once discovered. This means the emphasis has to be put upon adults having awareness of the indicators of trafficking to enable discovery and identification. This awareness is particularly important for those whose decisions may impact on their care arrangements, such as the police, immigration officers and legal representatives. This review has shown that when a child has not been recognised as being trafficked, or been identified as a child, young people have been criminalised and ended up in prison or adult immigration detention centres.

There was a serious concern about private fostering arrangements and how these can be used to hide trafficked children.

Trafficked children going missing

Stakeholders raised concerns about trafficked children's vulnerability to going missing, particularly soon after discovery. There was agreement that quick action had to be taken to minimise risk, such as developing a multi-agency safety plan, securing safe accommodation, working with specialist, trained and supported foster carers, providing intensive one-to-one support and the forming of a trusting relationship with an independent adult.

Some respondents felt that strategies to prevent trafficked children going missing should include the option to access support beyond the local area, such as the use of reciprocal arrangements between local authorities or a national specialist foster care programme.

When trafficked children do go missing, there was a call for a different response to that for other children who go missing from local authority care. There is a strong possibility that children return to their traffickers in these circumstances and therefore their cases should be considered in a similar way to abduction cases and treated accordingly by local authorities and the police.

Use of current guidance and multi-agency working

Stakeholders felt that current guidance and toolkits that contained information about the indicators of trafficking were helpful, but some respondents felt there was little understanding of how those indicators should be incorporated in assessment processes, as a guide on how to reduce risk and as a way of determining the most appropriate services for a child.

Stakeholders felt the responses to working with children who have been trafficked should be

primarily dealt with as a child protection and safeguarding issue, with a need for some specialism to ensure that trafficked children's particular needs and circumstances were understood and acted upon.

Effective multi-agency working was highlighted as being important in providing the right type of support to trafficked children. Key areas identified as working well at a local level included: provision of training across faiths and cultures; effective working with local police; establishment of a sub-group of the LSCB; multi-agency strategy meetings about individual cases; appointing specialist workers or commissioning local voluntary sector organisations to provide training and support; developing a communications strategy about private fostering across LSCB partners. The success of such multi-agency working was seen as being influenced by the level of importance placed upon the issue by local authorities. It should be noted that some of those who placed importance on this issue, and had processes in place, were not necessarily those that had high numbers of trafficked children in their areas.

Although government guidance (Department for Education and Home Office, 2011) has recommendations on strategic approaches to responding to trafficking, this review found that few local authorities in the sample had implemented this guidance by developing multi-agency strategic or operational groups focussing on trafficking, or undertaken local needs assessments.

Supporting trafficked children

Stakeholders emphasised that supporting trafficked children needed to be done with an emphasis on child protection, an approach that is sometimes compromised by a child's uncertain immigration status. Local authorities identified a lack of understanding among social workers of the immigration system and pressures relating to the immigration process as being a barrier to supporting trafficked children.

Ten of the children in this research had their ages disputed, and some had undergone multiple age assessments before it was agreed by the authorities that they were children. Age assessments were reported to be taking place in unsuitable settings, such as police stations, and the result of such assessments have an important impact on the type of care and support that people receive. For the children in this study, the consequences of having their age incorrectly identified were that they were placed in adult prison or in immigration detention, or had been housed in shared accommodation for adults. In some cases having their age disputed meant that children felt they could not trust their social workers.

In this sample, only a minority of the children were happy with the care and support they had received from their social workers. Although some individual social workers were identified as having been supportive, practice varied widely. Children often had multiple social workers or key workers, resulting in little continuity of care and children having to frequently repeat their stories of the traumatic abuse and exploitation they had experienced. Local authorities reported that they sometimes experience barriers to providing an allocated permanent social worker, and stakeholders emphasised that whoever supports the child needs the skills to manage complex situations.

Children's criticisms of the care provided were centred around a lack of contact, not being listened to and social workers not doing the things they were supposed to. There were examples of where action was only taken by social workers because voluntary sector organisations and

welfare solicitors had become involved and argued for the services and support required.

Local authorities reported that having insufficient accommodation presented a barrier to providing effective support. Stakeholders noted that inappropriate accommodation can pose risks to trafficked children, and have a detrimental effect on their ability to access education and leisure. Some children reported multiple moves and being placed in accommodation where they lived in fear.

Local authorities identified that they faced some difficulties in providing appropriate education, mental health services and leisure opportunities for trafficked children. Stakeholders emphasised the importance of trafficked children participating in education and noted that some received incorrect advice about entitlements from social workers and/or solicitors.

Transition to adult services and adulthood

Like all children who are looked after by a local authority, turning 18 can trigger a change in the type of support trafficked children will receive. For this group there is also the added issue of the decision making process on their immigration status.

Stakeholders were concerned that the reduction in support and services for these young people increases their vulnerability. This could put them at risk of being re-trafficked.

Pathway planning should take place to support children through transition. Most local authorities reported undertaking pathway planning, but the quality of this planning was questioned by stakeholders. Trafficked children reported not understanding the pathway planning process, felt unsupported and that they did not have the life skills to move to independent accommodation at 18 and cope with their situation.

The child's understanding of the process

Stakeholders and children highlighted that the care process can be confusing for trafficked children. Many people were involved in children's lives and children did not understand their roles or what support they were supposed to receive.

Children described the help they had received from voluntary sector organisations and solicitors to explain what was happening and advocate for them when support was lacking or inappropriate. Stakeholders echoed this and throughout this research highlighted the need for there to be a trusted adult in trafficked children's lives, who was independent from statutory services and could help children to navigate the care, immigration and criminal justice processes, and to challenge service providers who were not meeting their entitlements. A guardianship model was identified as a way to meet this need.

Training and awareness of trafficking

Throughout the research, participants identified a gap in training and awareness of trafficking issues at various levels. Stakeholders felt there was a need for all agencies working with children to be aware of trafficking and to know what course of action to take if they suspect that a child they have contact with may have been trafficked. Training for the police, immigration officials, staff in the youth offending and criminal justice system, and those working in the health and

education sectors was said to be necessary. Social workers and their managers were also identified as needing a better understanding of child trafficking. It was also felt that if more members of the general public have an awareness of trafficking, this could lead to more children being discovered and removed from exploitative situations.

Areas for improvement

Support provided for children who have been trafficked can be identified for improvement at three levels. These relate to the local, national, and cross-departmental and multi-agency level.

At the local level, areas identified relate to work directly with trafficked children. This in particular includes the identification and response to trafficked children and then need for increased training and implementation of existing guidance.

At the national level, findings suggest central government needs to be more influential in sending a clear message to local agencies reminding them of their statutory duties and the available guidance. There is also a need to address the constraints posed by policy which impacts on agencies' abilities to meet the welfare needs of children and to provide effective care.

Finally there is room for improvement in how government departments ensure their policies do not undermine each other and therefore areas of focus include ways to improve multi-agency working at different levels.

Local level

- 1 All agencies working with potential child victims of trafficking – particularly local authorities, youth offending services, police, immigration and border staff, health and education professionals, and non-governmental organisations – need to ensure that a child protection response is implemented when a child is suspected of being trafficked. This includes conducting a proper assessment of the child's needs and a multi-agency child protection investigation
- 2 Local authorities must ensure that if a separated child under 18 is identified, including older children aged 16 and 17, that he or she is treated as a child in need and accommodated, supported and supervised according to their welfare needs as set out in law and in statutory guidance. This would ensure that separated children who may later be identified as having been trafficked are properly supported from first identification
- 3 Anyone responding to referrals of trafficked or potentially trafficked children should follow the Achieving Best Evidence Guidance and be trained accordingly¹
- 4 Understanding of child trafficking and the statutory responsibilities to safeguard all children, regardless of their immigration status, nationality or documentation needs to be increased. This should be done through raising awareness and increased training, particularly involving those in statutory and non-statutory agencies working with potential victims of trafficking

1 Achieving Best Evidence in Criminal Proceedings Guidance on interviewing victims and witnesses, and guidance on using special measures: <http://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/victims-and-witnesses/vulnerable-witnesses/achieving-best-evidence-criminal-proceedings.pdf>

- 5 All agencies need to ensure they widely implement all statutory and practice guidance for safeguarding trafficked and separated children. All professionals should view potentially trafficked children as children first and foremost and entitled to a child protection response as a foundation for effective, protective interagency collaboration.

National level

- 6 National responses to all potential victims of child trafficking need to be implemented. This should include ensuring there are sufficient, appropriate options for good quality accommodation and care that mean all children have a full-time carer and are kept safe. This may include moving them away from the area where they would be at risk of being targeted by their traffickers or going missing
- 7 A system of protection needs to be developed which includes an independent trusted adult appointed to a separated child as soon as they come to an authority's attention. This person's role would ensure that all potential victims of trafficking are able to understand their rights, ensure that their voice is heard in decisions that affect them and are supported effectively through the different legal processes they are engaged in.

Cross-departmental and multi-agency working

- 8 The benefit of the doubt with respect to a young person's claimed age should be applied more consistently and throughout by all immigration staff and local authorities. Bearing in mind that documentation is not likely to show their real age, it should be given little weight in the age assessment
- 9 If there is good reason to doubt a young person's claimed age, a lawful age assessment should be conducted with input from a range of organisations that have had contact with the young person including statutory agencies and voluntary organisations. This would ensure that relevant evidence is collected early on so as to avoid lengthy and multiple assessments which negatively impact on the well-being of these young people.
- 10 Statutory guidance on conducting lawful age assessments should be developed for local authorities to ensure a consistent, holistic and child-centred approach
- 11 A Children's Rights Impact Assessment should be undertaken when all new government policies and legislation are developed. This would guard against negative impact on potential child victims of trafficking and ensure adherence to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and duties in UK legislation regarding the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children
- 12 A national system of data collection for trafficked children needs to be established to ensure better monitoring of children going missing from care. This should be implemented in every local area and be monitored by those with overall safeguarding responsibilities within existing structures, at different levels of government. An annual national report could track progress made in this area, by setting out how many separated children including potential victims of trafficking were referred to local authorities, how many went missing from care and if and when these children were found
- 13 Given the hidden nature of this abuse and exploitation, there is a need for trafficked children and young people to have a direct voice within decision-making processes

and a need for better awareness of the experiences faced by trafficked children at different levels of government. One way in which this could be addressed is through the establishment of a quarterly meeting between separated children including trafficked children and young people and Ministers, to ensure their voices are heard directly and that progress towards better care and protection arrangements is made. This could be facilitated by local authorities and NGOs and could replicate the work of the Children's Minister who meets directly with children in care and care leavers.

1 Introduction

1.1 The scoping review

This report presents the findings from a short, small scale Home Office funded scoping review of the practical care and safeguarding arrangements for trafficked children, and those who may have been trafficked, who are in the local authority care system. Specifically the aims of the review were to:

- Assess the experiences of children identified as trafficked or suspected trafficked and accommodated in local authority care
- Assess mechanisms in place to support trafficked or suspected trafficked children and the role of social workers, Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) and other professionals mapped as having had contact with the child in providing and accessing care appropriate for them
- Assess the multi-agency response in the context of best practice in child protection and safeguarding as set out in the Home Office/Department for Education – Safeguarding Children who may have been Trafficked Guidance (2007)
- Identify good practice and areas for improvements.

For the purposes of this scoping review, the agreed definition of trafficked children is ‘children who have been trafficked, and are now outside their country of origin’.²

1.2 Methodology and sample sizes

A multi-method approach was undertaken in order to gain both breadth and depth of information. Given the short time scale of less than six months, strands one and two of the review were undertaken simultaneously. Existing research (both academic research and grey literature), legislation and policy guidance were reviewed in the early stages of the project to place this new research in context. The primary research was conducted between January and May 2013.

1.2.1 Strand one: Qualitative in-depth interviews with children and young people identified as trafficked or suspected trafficked

Face-to-face interviews were undertaken with 17 young people who were trafficked when they were children.³ These young people were trafficked into the UK when they were between the ages of nine and 17 years. At the time of the interviews, they were aged between 15 and 23 years, which enabled some to reflect upon what happened at key stages in their lives such as the changes in support arrangements at the age of 18. There were 15 girls and two boys in the sample and they were recruited through voluntary organisations supporting trafficked children.

2 However, it is important to note that trafficking also extends to the movement of children for exploitation within the country.

3 For ease of reading we use the term children to mean children and young people aged under 18 years of age, as defined by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 (UNCRC).

Referrals of children through the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) suggest that there are more girls trafficked (or perhaps discovered) than boys, but the proportion is not as stark as the sample here. The high proportion of female participants reflects the way that the young people were recruited into this research, as they were often supported by projects specifically established to support trafficked girls. Attempts were made to recruit participants through local authorities, but these were not successful.

The children in the sample were from nine different countries of origin: Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Nigeria and Vietnam and a South American country.⁴ In the UK, the young people lived in at least eight different local authority areas in London, the South East and West Midlands. The reasons they had been trafficked included for domestic servitude (seven people), forced labour and criminal activity including cannabis cultivation and selling drugs (three people) and sexual exploitation (nine people).⁵

The interviews explored the practical care and safeguarding arrangements for trafficked, or suspected trafficked children, from their perspective. Interviews gathered information about the types of services they had received and how professionals supported them, their understanding of care processes, and transition at 18.

Interviews were conducted using a themed template to guide the interviewer through exploring the experiences of the child. It was important to be aware when interviewing that some children may have difficulties in gathering their thoughts and expressing them clearly in an interview. The themed template ensured that children were given the best possible opportunity to discuss their experiences and express their feelings in a way that suited them; while also maintaining an overall structure to ensure information was gathered on consistent themes. Sensitivity was required given the difficulties that some of the children might have in understanding their situation and the care processes in which they are caught up. To offset the fact that some children might be intimidated by a rigid process, the interviews were undertaken in an informal manner. Interviews were in the main conducted by a worker from within the organisation through which the young person had been recruited. An ethically robust and supportive environment was created to minimise any possible distress to the young person, and they were interviewed at project locations as these are a known safe, supportive and comfortable environment for them.

Interviews lasted a maximum of an hour and with the child's permission these interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. Where appropriate, and again with the child's permission, supplementary information about their individual circumstances and contacts with agencies were collected from the voluntary sector staff working with them. Time was spent with the child to ensure that they understood and agreed with any information shared.

Each child who took part was given £20 in recognition of the time they had given, and all travel expenses were reimbursed.

1.1.2 Strand two: Part A: Online surveys of local authorities

An online survey of Directors of Children's Services in every local authority in England was undertaken in order to explore direct practice in terms of: the care and support provided to

4 We do not wish to specify the country here to provide anonymity.

5 The numbers here exceed the sample size as some of the children were exploited in more than one way.

trafficked children, who is providing this support, how effective this is and whether there are gaps in provision.

A similar online survey was also sent to a sample of 30 Heads of Local Safeguarding Children's Boards (LSCBs) in order to examine safeguarding provision and processes, multi-agency responses and how LSCBs are implementing practice in line with relevant guidance.

After numerous follow up emails and telephone calls, 52 local authorities (34 per cent) responded to the survey of Directors of Children's Services. In order to achieve this response rate, local authorities were encouraged to complete the survey online, via email or post, or via a telephone interview. Most chose to complete it via email. The survey was completed by professionals from a range of positions including those with responsibility for quality and delivery, safeguarding managers/LSCB managers, senior frontline managers (from asylum, referral and assessment and looked after children teams), a commissioning officer and a Director of Children's Services.

Of these 52 authorities, 23 had supported trafficked children in the last calendar year (January 2012 – December 2012), 25 stated that they had not supported any trafficked children within that year; the remaining four did not know whether they had or had not. The numbers of trafficked children, in this same year, supported by the local authorities ranged from 0 – 17 children, the average being 4.5 per authority. However when excluding those authorities with airports and ports based within them (and thus skewing the data), the average was 2.6.

Following a number of reminders, the response rate for the survey of local safeguarding children's boards was five. The same variety of completion methods was also offered to these respondents. This response rate is disappointing and may be a reflection on the short time scales available for this review. As a result of this low number of responses it was not feasible to analyse this data as one would for a larger survey, so we were unable to use the data in the report.

1.2.3 Strand two: Part B: Telephone interviews with key stakeholders

In order to gather more in depth information, 18 telephone interviews were undertaken with a sample of key stakeholders. These were professionals who had direct (or indirect) experience of working with trafficked children, either in local authority, voluntary sector, or legal roles. The sample included nine representatives from six local authorities (social care managers and front line social workers), two solicitors (welfare and immigration) and seven voluntary sector staff (six of these were front-line workers with direct experience of supporting trafficked/suspected trafficked children). It had been hoped that the sample would include representation from the police service. However, despite continued efforts, we were unable to secure their involvement within the time scales. Although individual police officers were keen to support the research, seeking approval to participate acted as a barrier.

These interviews explored the processes to support and protect trafficked children, gathered data on what had been found to work and why, and asked about gaps in provision and barriers to providing particular support.⁶

6 All research instruments are available on request from the authors.

1.2.4 Expert stakeholder seminar

Towards the end of the review, a small expert stakeholder seminar was held to review and discuss emerging findings. Representatives from across local authorities, the voluntary sector and others were invited to attend. Attendees consisted of social workers and social work managers, representatives from LSCBs, voluntary organisations and one solicitor. Officials from the Home Office and Department for Education attended as observers. Some of the discussion and examples from this seminar feature in the report.

1.2.5 Ethical approval

Ethical considerations and approval for this scoping review were overseen by The Children's Society ethics committee.

1.2.6 Data analysis

All survey data were cleaned and then analysed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science). Data collected from the telephone interviews and face-to-face qualitative interviews with children were fully transcribed and then thematically coded and analysed.

1.3 Structure of the report

Following an explanation of the background to child trafficking and the policy context, the evidence gathered from the research and from the review of literature is presented in a number of themed areas. The themes are organised around the main areas of concern identified by research participants:

- Discovery and identification
- Trafficked children who go missing
- Use of current guidance and multi-agency working
- Support for trafficked children
- Transition to adult services and adulthood
- The child's understanding of the process
- Training and awareness of trafficking
- National level responsibilities

The report concludes with a summary of findings and areas for improvement that have been identified, and also highlights issues requiring further research.

2 Background information

2.1 What is child trafficking?

In international legislation, trafficking is defined as:

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 a 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. (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 in 2006).

Within this protocol a child is defined as being under 18 years of age, the same age-band as used in the broader United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 (UNCRC).

It is important to note a distinction between ‘child’ and ‘adult’ trafficking. An incident of trafficking involving a person under 18 need not involve coercion or deception. Any situation involving children being recruited and moved for the purposes of exploitation is considered to be trafficking as a child is deemed unable to give consent to their own exploitation. Trafficked children may themselves be unaware of their situation.

2.2 Confusion between trafficking and smuggling

Whilst the terms “trafficking” and “smuggling” are often confused, there is an important distinction between the two. Government guidance on safeguarding children who may have been trafficked states that smuggling describes an event whereby migrants or asylum seekers pay people to help them enter the country illegally, after which there is no longer a relationship. Trafficked children, however, are forced into exploitation by the trafficker or person into whose control they are delivered or sold, either during transportation and/or on arrival in the country of destination, sometimes following coercion or deception (Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), 2007). In short, the relationship between the smuggler and the smuggled person ends on entry in to the country of destination, whereas when a person is trafficked an exploitative relationship continues.

Although not necessarily disputing the definition, some writers have highlighted that making such distinctions can lead to a two-tier system of ‘deserving trafficked children’ and ‘undeserving smuggled children’ (Skrivankova, 2007, quoted in Rigby, 2011) and can hide the fact that a smuggled child can be exploited, presenting complications for practitioners trying to assess and support vulnerable children.

2.3 Trafficking across borders and within the UK

Child trafficking involves children and young people being transported for the purposes of exploitation and this movement can take place across international borders or within them (sometimes referred to as ‘internal trafficking’). However, it is also the case that a child can arrive from abroad via means that do not involve trafficking, but later on find themselves being trafficked within the UK.

It is also important to note that entry into the UK can be through legal or illegal means. In many cases trafficked children will enter the UK on false documents or through clandestine means. However, they may also enter the UK legally, for example, on short-term visas, student visas or as nationals who do not need a visa to enter e.g. European Economic Area (EEA) nationals.

As already described, for the purposes of this scoping review, the agreed definition of trafficked children was children who have been trafficked, and are now outside their country of origin.

2.4 Types of exploitation

Children are trafficked for different types of exploitation, including sexual exploitation, illegal adoption, under-age forced marriage,⁷ benefit fraud and child labour (for example, domestic servitude, work in sweatshops and criminal work such as begging or producing and selling drugs). Child trafficking has been shown to operate through personal and family links as well as through highly organised international criminal networks (CEOP, 2009; ECPAT UK and Save the Children, 2007b; Harris and Robinson, 2007).

Children can suffer a broad range of types of exploitation. For example, ECPAT UK (2007b) raised concerns that although children may have been trafficked for exploitative labour, they might become highly vulnerable to sexual exploitation once they were living in the UK, especially if they had been forced to live on the streets or in unsafe accommodation.

Links with sexual exploitation often dominate the agenda when child trafficking is discussed, but this misrepresents the varied nature of the phenomenon, and a focus on sexual exploitation, particularly of young women, can distort how the issue is thought about and addressed for example, in failing to acknowledge trafficking of young men (Pearce, *et al*, 2009).

2.5 Extent of child trafficking in the UK

Given the hidden nature of child trafficking the actual number and extent of child trafficking victims in the UK is unknown. Agencies who identify children who they think have been trafficked can refer children to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) through the ‘first responder’ agencies,⁸ however, there is an acknowledged lack of awareness of this system amongst agencies. The NRM is a central system managed by the UK Human Trafficking Centre (UKHTC) which is responsible for identifying, monitoring and protecting all victims of trafficking, and also referring them for support. The NRM is also the mechanism through which the UKHTC collects data about all victims of human trafficking.

7 For further exploration of this form of trafficking, see Bokhari (2009).

8 For a list of first responder agencies please see <http://www.soca.gov.uk/about-soca/about-the-ukhtc/national-referral-mechanism>.

The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) has previously published Strategic Threat Assessments which identified trends, themes and patterns in child trafficking (2009, 2011). The sources for these assessments included referrals to the NRM and referrals received by the Child Trafficking Advice and Information Line (CTAIL). The CEOP reports identified 325 and 287 potential child victims per annum in 2009 and 2010 respectively (Home Office, 2011). However, it is argued that official statistics do not give a complete picture of the extent of child trafficking as significant numbers of children are not known to authorities, or have not been identified as trafficked. For example, the Anti-Trafficking Monitoring Group highlights that individuals are often not referred to the NRM because they do not see the benefits of being referred or are fearful of the consequences due to their immigration status (2010). The issue often cited is that the UK Border Agency (UKBA)⁹ has a dual role in determining an individual's immigration claim to remain in the UK, as well as being a competent authority for deciding whether someone is a victim of trafficking.

Last year the Serious and Organised Crime Agency published its first UKHTC baseline assessment aimed at describing the extent of human trafficking in the UK by gathering data from various statutory and non-governmental organisations (2012). It reported that 2,077 potential victims of trafficking were identified in the UK during 2011. Of these 489 or 24 per cent were children, while for 7 per cent of potential victims, their age was unknown. However, the UKHTC report highlights that the number of victims of human trafficking may be higher than this, pointing out that over half (54 per cent) of all potential victims of trafficking were not referred to the NRM.

In addition, the number of child victims of trafficking is likely to be further undercounted because data from children's services was not collected as part of this assessment.

2.6 Trends in child trafficking

In the light of the challenges for estimating the scale of child trafficking discussed in the previous section, identifying trends may also be difficult. As ECPAT UK and Save the Children argued in their 2007 report, data may be too unreliable to know, for example, whether trafficking from certain countries has increased, or that there are patterns for gender or age. The same report cautioned that the nature of trafficking may be in constant flux and there was a need to remain open and alert to the prospect of widely varying manifestations to ensure that different forms do not go undetected.

Pearce *et al* (2009) argue that experience of trafficking can be used to ascertain patterns. However, practitioners in their research were wary of over-categorising or profiling communities for fear of labelling them, overshadowing evidence of variation and limiting understanding of the complexity of the issue.

Taking these caveats into account, some evidence of trends in the scale and nature of trafficking has been published. *Human Trafficking: The Government Strategy* (Home Office, 2011) reported that child victims are trafficked in the greatest number from Vietnam, Nigeria, China and Eastern Europe. However, a total number of 47 different countries were identified as sources of child trafficking in the UK by CEOP in their Strategic Threat Assessment in April 2010.

9 Following the abolition of the UKBA in March 2013, the competent authority function now sits under the Home Office Immigration and Visas department. The concern remains relevant.

CEOP's report in 2011 provided a breakdown of the profile of known trafficked children. From these figures it can be seen that more females than males were identified (although this does vary by region; for example, trafficking victims from Asian countries are mostly male). The age distribution of child trafficking is broadly similar across regions of the world; with most child trafficking victims aged 14 – 16. This data set only records the principal form of exploitation; these included cannabis cultivation, benefit fraud, criminal exploitation such as shop-lifting, domestic servitude, labour exploitation such as construction or agriculture, and sexual exploitation.

It is also important to note that there is evidence that children can experience multiple abusive and exploitative situations prior to leaving their home country, in transit and on arrival in their destination country. Evidence also suggests that children are also rarely trafficked for one type of exploitation, and are susceptible to multiple abuses during the trafficking process (CEOP, 2011; Rigby, 2011).

The evidence, such as it exists, points to a wide diversity in the children's experience of trafficking, as was further underlined by research by The Children's Society (2009), which analysed 42 trafficking cases and indicated that patterns of trafficking varied widely. The children in this sample came from rural and city locations, their parents' professions varied from farmers to politicians, some children had not been able to afford education whilst at least one child had attended a private school. This study found no clear examples of parents/carers sending their children abroad knowing they would be exploited. In many instances, where family members had arranged private fostering arrangements, it was fuelled by a desire for their child to have a safer and better life. The desire for a good education was also identified to be used deliberately by traffickers to convince parents to send their children away. Some young people came to the UK to join family, and for some of these, exploitation occurred when they were later moved on to live with other family members or family friends.

2.7 Who are the exploiters?

The Children's Society's research (2009) found that most trafficked children were brought to the UK by someone from their own country, and that they lived with people from their own country, religious or ethnic background. The same study indicated that for those children who lived with relatives a formal kinship care assessment had not been carried out by children's services, even when the young person had been transferred to the relative from the care of the local authority.

There is some evidence to suggest that trafficking may be carried out by people of high status who have the power and resources to be able to coordinate the arrangements (The Children's Society, 2009). These people can be from the same community as the young person, the destination country or a third country. Given this, it has also been suggested that others within the community of origin of a child, or the community of destination, may be scared of the status and power of the traffickers and are therefore less likely to intervene or disclose information. Similarly, children may consider these people to be more powerful than the police or other authorities, again leading to less disclosure (The Children's Society, 2009).

3 Policy context

This section of the report summarises the key policies, legislation and guidance governing child trafficking in the UK, focusing on recent changes since the coalition government came into power in May 2010.

3.1 International legislation

In recent years the focus on trafficking has widened from prosecuting trafficking offences to legislation and policy relating to the safeguarding and welfare of trafficking victims including children.

The UK has signed up to a number of international frameworks on human trafficking:

- In 2006, the UK ratified the UN Trafficking Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (the 'Palermo Protocol'). Its objectives include a commitment to prevent and combat trafficking in persons, and protect and assist trafficking victims
- The Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (which came into force in 2009) led to the establishment of the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) – the central system for identifying, monitoring and supporting all victims of trafficking (discussed earlier in the report)
- In October 2011, the UK opted into the European Directive on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Protecting Victims of Human Trafficking.

The UK was recently inspected by the Council of Europe's Group of Experts (GRETA) on its commitments under the Council of Europe Convention. The GRETA report (2012) expressed concerns over the significant number of unaccompanied children who are placed in local authority care and go missing. British authorities were advised to take further steps to improve the identification of child victims of trafficking, and to ensure that all unaccompanied children who are potential victims of trafficking are assigned a legal guardian and are provided with suitable safe accommodation and adequately trained supervisors or foster parents.

In order to be compliant with the European Directive the UK was required to bring in laws, regulations and administrative provision by April 2013. Necessary measures include the appointment of a guardian or a representative for a child victim of trafficking; providing assistance, support and protection and finding a durable solution based on an individual assessment of the best interests of the child; the provision of appropriate and safe accommodation and material assistance, as well as necessary medical treatment including psychological assistance, counselling and information, and translation and interpretation services where appropriate.¹⁰ However, there is disagreement as to what extent the UK government has complied with these commitments.¹¹

10 DIRECTIVE 2011/36/EU OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 5 April 2011 on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2002/629/JHA: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2011:101:0001:0011:EN:PDF>

3.2 The government's trafficking strategy

In July 2011, the Home Office published a trafficking strategy, which (amongst other measures) confirms the government's commitment to improving identification and care arrangements for child victims of trafficking. It emphasises the need to raise awareness of child trafficking and prevent re-trafficking. It also sets out a commitment to work with various agencies to tackle issues affecting trafficked children. These include:

- Addressing the issue of trafficked children going missing from care (coordinated by CEOP)¹²
- Working with multi-agency partners to identify children at borders to ensure they are safeguarded at the earliest opportunity
- Introducing streamlined information gathering about children's needs and experiences by local authorities, the police and the Home Office to ensure children's vulnerabilities are taken into account
- Prioritising the safeguarding needs of trafficked children involved in criminal activity, alongside police, the criminal justice system, CEOP and the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO).

3.3 The Inter-Departmental Ministerial Group on Human Trafficking

In October 2012, a report was published by the Inter-Departmental Ministerial Group on Human Trafficking which contains a specific chapter on child trafficking and outlines the government's commitment to prevent trafficked children going missing from local authority care (Inter-Departmental Ministerial Group on Human Trafficking, 2012). This echoes findings from the all-party parliamentary inquiry which found that hundreds of trafficked children go missing from local authority care each year – many within 48 hours of being received into care – the majority of whom are never found again (The APPG for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults and the APPG for Looked After Children and Care Leavers, 2012). The ministerial report recognises an increase in the number of trafficked children and sets out further work required in relation to organised criminal gangs and support mechanisms for victims.

3.4 Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of trafficked children

Section 11 of the Children Act 2004 places a statutory duty on key people and bodies including local authorities, police and youth offending services, to make arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. A similar duty exists on the Home Secretary under Section 55 of the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009 to make arrangements for ensuring that immigration, asylum, nationality and customs functions are discharged having regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in the UK (UK Border Agency and Department for Children, Families and Schools, 2009). In addition the Working Together guidance (Department

11 For example, in March 2013 a joint letter was sent to the Prime Minister David Cameron and Immigration Minister Mark Harper by charities demanding legislative change to ensure compliance with the Directive:
<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/government-failing-to-bring-britain-in-line-with-european-rules-on-human-trafficking-say-charities-8528099.html>

12 By December 2013, CEOP, the UKHTC and the National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA) will be merged into the National Crime Agency (NCA). CEOP will retain its focus on missing and abducted children, and sexual exploitation, and take a strategic lead on child trafficking.

for Education, 2013) sets out how organisations and individuals should work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and how practitioners should conduct assessments.

The government's practice guidance sets out procedures to be followed and the responsibilities of various statutory agencies (Department for Education and the Home Office, 2011). It states that Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs) should identify a child trafficking coordinator to improve information sharing between local authorities, the police and the 'competent authorities' of the NRM.¹³ The practice guidance also commits to rolling out further guidance and a national toolkit to safeguard trafficked children produced by the London Safeguarding Children Board (2011).

In 2011, the Home Office also published a cross-government strategy on missing children and adults which outlined the role of the National Crime Agency (NCA) and CEOP in tackling trafficked children who go missing from care. The Home Office has also committed to training GPs, midwives, youth workers and social workers to better identify and help victims of human trafficking.¹⁴

3.5 Legal aid reforms affecting trafficked children

The Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (which came into force in April 2013) affects trafficked children, since they are henceforth excluded from legally-aided advice and representation with their immigration case for obtaining leave to remain in the UK except in some limited circumstances. Changes under this Act mean that only once a child is recognised as a victim or potential victim of trafficking under the NRM will they be eligible for legal aid in relation to immigration claims or appeals – removing the right to access legal aid prior to being referred to the NRM or before getting a decision on reasonable grounds (unless their immigration claim is on grounds of asylum or on Article Three of the European Convention on Human Rights).¹⁵

Given the government data highlighted above that over half of identified trafficking victims in 2011 were not referred to the NRM, it is likely that many trafficked children will not be able to access legal advice and representation in their immigration claim unless they also have an asylum claim and may be at risk of removal by the authorities to their country of origin where they may not be safe.

At the time of writing the government was also consulting on further cuts to legal aid which would introduce a residence test for legal aid.¹⁶ This would mean that an individual would need to have been 'lawfully resident' in the UK continuously for 12 months at the time of application – a condition that clearly applies to some trafficked children who have entered the UK clandestinely, on false documents or have overstayed a visa and would therefore not meet the test. NGOs have argued that these could have serious detrimental consequences for trafficked children who rely on these provisions to access the support, services and protections they potentially need and are legally entitled to (Refugee Children's Consortium, 2013).

13 Two competent authorities are formerly the UK Border Agency – now part of the Immigration and Visa department within the Home Office – and the UK Human Trafficking Centre.

14 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/more-training-to-identify-and-support-victims-of-human-trafficking>

15 Which means, for example, that children will not be able to get advice if their claim is on Article 8 'right to private life' or 'welfare' grounds – see Refugee Children's Consortium (2012) briefing on the impact of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act

16 Transforming Legal Aid: Delivering a more credible and efficient system (April 2013): <https://consult.justice.gov.uk/digital-communications/transforming-legal-aid>

3.6 Ongoing debate

Recent parliamentary debates have reviewed policy issues affecting trafficked children. The Education Select Committee report on its inquiry into child protection highlighted concerns around the treatment of trafficked children and stated that: *'In all cases, these children must be treated as children first, and not just as either criminals or immigration cases.'* (Education Committee, 2012)

In December 2012, during a parliamentary debate on trafficking in the UK, MPs highlighted the issue of children being refused local authority support because their age was disputed by local authorities or the Home Office, suggesting a discrepancy between practice responses and what the legislation and guidance suggests ought to be happening.¹⁷

The Joint Committee on Human Rights (JCHR) has also investigated the rights of unaccompanied children, including a focus on those who have been victims of trafficking (2013).

Their report, published in early June 2013, included many recommendations around the treatment of all unaccompanied migrant children which are pertinent to trafficked or suspected trafficked children – and six recommendations specific to the treatment of trafficked children, including for an independent review of the operation of the NRM, and that the UKHTC is better resourced by government and given sole responsibility as the 'competent authority' under the NRM.¹⁸

Finally, echoing the JCHR's view, the US State Department (US Department of State, 2013) recently produced a comprehensive overview of trafficking in 188 countries, with recommendations for the UK including:

- Ensure that law enforcement priorities to combat organised crime are effectively balanced with a victim-centred response to protect trafficking victims
- Ensure that a greater number of victims are identified and provided access to necessary services
- Develop secure accommodation for child trafficking victims
- Establish a system of guardianship for unaccompanied foreign children.

17 Debate on the Inter-Departmental Ministerial Report on Human Trafficking (December 2012)
<http://www.parliament.uk/business/news/2012/december/mps-debate-report-on-human-trafficking>

18 See paragraphs 140 to 153 of the JCHR report (2013).

4 Evidence from this review

There is a dearth of research in the area of child trafficking reflecting possibly the fact that the issue has only been slowly recognised at a practice level for the last 10 years or so. There has been little research evidence gathered that can shed light on a multitude of areas such as; the experiences of the children and young people, the extent of this issue, ways in which child trafficking can be prevented, and ways in which trafficked children and young people can be supported.

This review draws together existing information and uses primary data gathered from children and key stakeholders. To present the evidence, this chapter focuses on the following themes:

- Discovery and identification of trafficked children
- Trafficked children going missing
- Use of current guidance and multi-agency working
- Support for trafficked children
- Transition to adult services/adulthood and independence
- The child's understanding of the process
- Training and awareness of trafficked children

4.1 Discovery and identification of trafficked children

If you come newly you can't even understand because you have never been in a place like this before, somebody like me I don't know my way out. I can't even speak I don't know how to talk to anybody. I wish I knew my rights I wish I knew what to do. Precious¹⁹

4.1.1 Circumstances around discovery

There have been few prior research studies where trafficked children's perspectives were included, so little is known about their experiences around discovery, disclosure and identification (Pearce *et al*, 2009).

Young people in our sample had been living in different circumstances before they were discovered, ranging from being locked in and threatened with physical violence, to being able to leave the house and interact with others as part of their 'roles' (such as taking children to school or attending places of worship).

They had escaped their exploiters, or been discovered, in several different ways:

- Five children escaped from exploiters by methods such as smashing through a door, sneaking out when captors were drunk and being aided by a 'guard' to leave
- Three were thrown out by the families they were with after disputes (one was physically thrown out of a window)

¹⁹ We have used pseudonyms to protect the identities of the children that participated.

- Three were discovered when the brothels they were working in were raided by the police
- Three were stopped at a border by officials when their traffickers were attempting to move them to a different EU country
- Three were taken to social services or voluntary sector organisations after approaching a priest, an education advisor and a passer-by (in the latter case, the young person specifically asked the passer-by to help her find social services as she was aware they may be able to help).

It is important to note that although these were the circumstances that led to the children being made known to public authorities, they were not necessarily identified as either having been trafficked, or as being a child, at this point.

The period immediately after discovery was typically one of fear and confusion. One girl who had been arrested at a border described her fear:

Being in a police station until the next day. For the first day I am very scared. Very scared crying, fainting, they took me to hospital; bring me back to the police station. God, it's really, really horrible. Precious

Previous research with trafficked children (The Children's Society, 2009) suggests that disclosures:

- Are often unintentional (when seeking support with another issue such as education or immigration advice)
- Are frequently not forthcoming until a child is safe and with a person whom they trust (this could be some time after leaving the exploitative situation)
- Sometimes occur when children felt their situation could not get any worse (e.g. they are on the streets, are pregnant or have been badly physically abused).

Pearce *et al* (2009) state that identification and disclosure are rarely single events, but are staggered over time and will only occur when the child has a trusted and secure relationship with a practitioner, thus pointing to the need for continuity of interpreter, key worker or guardian.

4.1.2 The complexity of disclosure and identification of trafficked children

Initial identification and assessment present a major challenge for reasons including cultural issues, the trauma and fear of children affecting engagement, and the potential for ongoing contact with traffickers to compromise safeguarding (Rigby, 2011, p324)

When examining disclosure and discovery of trafficked children it is important that the complexity of trafficking, and how this interplays with disclosure and identification, is properly understood. There are a number of powerful intrinsic factors which affect a child's ability and willingness to disclose, and they may not know that their treatment warrants disclosure. Willingness to disclose is affected by fear, and the ability to disclose is affected by knowledge, cultural norms and whether the exploitation is recognised as wrong. Equally important is having the opportunity to disclose in a safe and trusted environment.

Several of the young people in the sample did not know which country they were in because of the tight control exerted over them by their exploiters. They were isolated from others, preventing them from gaining an understanding of what routes of escape there may have been for them, and who they could approach if they successfully fled their situation.

Young people thought they were going to Canada and ended up in the UK. I have a young person who thought she was in Germany for quite a few months when she was in the UK, and it was only when she managed to read a newspaper after she got rescued that she realised she was actually in the UK not Germany. She was convinced she was in Germany from what the trafficker had told her. They absolutely don't know. Certainly those who are in cannabis factories in particular I have found they don't have a clue where they are or what they are doing, or what they are doing is illegal either. Respondent from a voluntary organisation

Trafficked children may not know about their rights and options, their own immigration status or what determines the right to reside (Pearce et al, 2009). This lack of awareness makes these children more vulnerable to manipulation by their exploiters who may tell them that they are illegally in the country, could be sent to prison or sent home. The quote from Precious at the beginning of this chapter illustrates how a lack of understanding of the system in the UK, combined with language difficulties and isolating experiences, had prevented her from escaping her situation sooner. Similar experiences were reported by other young interviewees.

If I knew your rights you could do something early, it depends, and my [exploiter] never told me about what your right is because if you know your right you'd be out of this place without them even knowing. So they keep it because if you know about things then you're not going to be treated the way they are treating you. If someone was more open to us. Hope

Stakeholders also noted that a lack of knowledge about who to turn to, and sometimes a lack of understanding of what is considered in the UK to be child maltreatment, can impair a child's ability to escape exploitative situations.

They are in a very parlous state in terms of their knowledge of how they can be protected, which then sets them apart from children who are suffering abuse who are indigenous children, who know that they can talk to teachers or to health workers or to police or to social workers or to Childline, and know there is somewhere they can go with their concerns or their unhappiness, whereas children from overseas do not have that option. Respondent from a voluntary organisation

Many of the young people interviewed expressed a fear of the consequences if they attempted to escape their traffickers. They had been threatened with physical violence, told to not trust the police or strangers as they would do them harm, and told they would be sent back to their countries of origin if they revealed their situation to anybody.

There are so many people out there who are still going through the same situation like the way I was before. They need help but they can't get it, they don't know how to explain to people. Some of them are scared, even me when I see the police I am always running. Most especially with their uniform, it's just hard for me to go in front of them and tell them things that have happened to me. So the trust wasn't there. That's why. Valerie

Several girls from Nigeria explained that juju spells had been put on them which resulted in an intense fear of the consequences of disclosure and ensured compliance with the traffickers' wishes and stories.²⁰ Some young people were specifically concerned that they would bring harm to their family if they disclosed their situations because this was an explicit threat made by their traffickers. This was mentioned also by stakeholders.

I am very cautious about talking in generalisations, but for the purpose of answering this question, at the one end of the scale you have got perhaps your Vietnamese trafficked child who is going to be extremely difficult to disentangle from his traffickers because of family pressure or very real threats to his safety or family's safety if he doesn't comply with what the traffickers want...so a child who is facing extreme threats to himself and his family and is told you can earn several thousand pounds by coming with us, and if you don't, you and your family will suffer serious harm, is likely to make the decision of going to earn several thousand pounds, but of course we don't think it is in their interest. It is very difficult to unpick the pressures on that child, the cultural pressures in the background and so on that has led him into the situation he is in. Respondent from a voluntary organisation

The fact that many of the children did not know their rights, or were concerned about the potential consequences of leaving their exploiters contributed to them not seeking escape routes earlier. For those who were kept under close control and surveillance, such as in brothels, a cannabis factory and those locked in houses and subject to domestic servitude, it may have been clearer to them that they were being kept against their will and that this was not 'normal'. Their descriptions of getting away, sometimes by a dramatic escape where they evaded their captors and left the house with few possessions, indicate that they were aware of this, but for others it had taken longer to understand there were not going to be improvements in their situations and that what was happening was not right.

I could have gone sooner if I knew I was going to be safe because even now when I think about it I feel really stupid. Even some people said I was stupid to be there for that long. Because why don't you run away, where would I run away to? I have nobody! And this woman scared me every day and told me not to talk to anybody. Christine

The desire for schooling, or someone questioning a child's lack of education, facilitated an escape route for two girls in the sample. Christine, after six years of looking after a family and their relatives' children, was given a note by a teacher at the school where she took the children she cared for, when the teacher recognised she had not received any education. Christine took the note to Connexions who then called social services and the police.

Diana had mentioned her frustration at not attending school to a woman who befriended her at the school gates where she was dropping off the children she cared for. Diana said that she was helping out her sister, rather than revealing the truth, but the woman said there were people who could help children and mentioned social services. Deterioration in the situation with the family she was working for eventually led to her approaching a stranger in a park and asking where social services was. Having located their offices she made contact and was immediately taken into care. Diana did not realise the consequences of her actions, and was frustrated that she was not asked if she wanted to go back to the family:

²⁰ Juju spells are associated with witchcraft in West Africa and are sometimes used by traffickers to enforce submission of those they are trafficking so they fear escape.

...there was no advice, nobody asked me, 'do you want to go back to the family?' or something like that. I kept it to myself. I didn't say it to nobody that I wanted to go back to the family. In everything it just happened there is nothing I can do about it. Diana

Diana's desire to return to her exploiters reveals the complexity of the situations trafficked children can find themselves in – and how they may not understand what is in their best interests. This is reflected upon further in the section concerning trafficked children who go missing.

Some stakeholder interviewees suggested that agencies were failing to spot the signs of trafficking, ask the right questions or provide appropriate opportunities for children to talk:

When young people are in a house and are working in domestic servitude – often that is mistaken as a cultural thing or questions are not asked around children being there – so people being aware to ask for documents, or to notice signs of behaviour between adults and children or between the different children – that child who may be used as a domestic servant being treated slightly different to other children, is not going to school, sometimes may appear to be a bit more dishevelled, wearing clothes that are slightly different, things like that when social workers are actually going in and doing any sort of assessments in houses. Respondent from a voluntary organisation

Quite often some of the young children I have worked with, they are in a house, they have been kept locked up for quite a few years, and they would have come across social workers or police who would have visited either because of concerns with other children or illegal activity they are involved in, and those social workers have not thought to ask questions round who this child was 'is this your child, and can we see some documents', and they have just been left there, and it doesn't give them much hope then or assurance that they are going to find a safe place, and hence prevents them from coming out. Respondent from a voluntary organisation

There were examples from the children in this study of both social services and the police missing opportunities to identify trafficked children earlier. Hope came to the attention of the local authority after she was hit by the woman she was living with and sustained bruising. The local authority did not make any checks and only issued a warning to the 'aunt'.

The police visited the house where Christine was being kept after she called them as she feared physical violence from the man who lived there. When they arrived, the man claimed she was his daughter and she was asked what had happened in front of him and therefore did not disclose.

I don't want to be around him and when the police came and the police talk to the man and then they ask me what happened, I didn't want to talk I was just crying and then they asked the man who am I to him. He say I am his daughter and they say what is you daughter date of birth, he say I don't know my wife usually keep the children and stuff I can't remember it. And they asking me if you feel threatened or anything say something and I couldn't say it standing there so they didn't do anything. Christine

The police did not make any further checks and Christine continued to be exploited until she found another way out.

These findings reinforce those summarised in the ECPAT UK and Save the Children report discussed earlier:

Victim identification was found to be ad hoc, unsystematic and sometimes accidental; information is not always recorded or passed on to relevant agencies; and children might be in the looked-after system for some time before they are identified as a victim of trafficking. This increases the vulnerability of already highly vulnerable children, and... leads to children going missing or other tragic consequences. (p6, 2007)

This suggests, as they went on to argue, that action by agencies should be based on suspicion of trafficking, not on waiting for conclusive evidence, because such evidence can be difficult or sometimes impossible to gather.

Pearce *et al* also discussed this issue, noting practitioner concerns that children's accounts may be hard to understand, be full of discrepancies and accompanied by challenging or difficult behaviour – leading to situations where *'it may be easier to ignore or disbelieve the situation than to try to respond without adequate resources'* (p9, 2009). They stated that a 'culture of disbelief' and of suspicion can silence a child, particularly when their age or immigration status is being challenged, or when professionals are not aware of trafficking and may feel the extent of the violence and abuse being described by the child is unbelievable.

As one local authority social worker stated when being interviewed for this review;

It is identifying them first, because we may be on the tip of the iceberg in terms of what we are working on currently.

As children are not in the best position to be able to identify and disclose their exploitation, people coming into contact with children need to be aware of the signs of trafficking. This was discussed in the stakeholder meeting. Professionals present had examples of people in the community, including neighbours, notifying the appropriate authorities of their suspicions about children who, for instance, appeared not to be attending school. The sample of children interviewed included those who, upon physically escaping, approached strangers, sometimes waiting to hear someone speak a language they could understand.

4.1.3 The criminalisation of trafficked children

Many voluntary sector organisations and others have called for trafficked children not to be criminalised for the work they have been forced to do, or activities they become involved in (see, for example, Centre for Social Justice, 2013).

Evidence from this review confirms consistent practitioner concerns on this matter.

When they find young people in those situations [they need] not to quickly judge – or discriminate – and to be aware of trafficking, and that there might be a young person who is found in a brothel with other adults and actually that is not a choice, they are being exploited. I think sometimes there is a judgement as well that there is a choice in it. Respondent from a voluntary organisation

I think there is the danger of an assumption that the situations where trafficked children are found means they are not seen as children in the first instance – whether it is a police raid

on a brothel or cannabis house, or picking someone up in the street for selling DVDs – I think the viewing of a person found in that situation as a criminal, as someone involved in their own criminal activity, I think it is the first thought in some professionals' minds that they have control over their own actions so they are probably an adult as opposed to a child who is a victim caught up in this. Respondent from a voluntary organisation

The local authority survey indicated that the vast majority of local authorities receive referrals of suspected trafficked children from the police, and therefore the police will often be the first agency a child encounters. However, an interviewee explained that police responses were of varied quality.

There is disparity within the police. We have some excellent working relationships with individual police officers and teams who are aware of the issues and work very closely with other supporting agencies to ensure children are seen as victims in this and are protected and supported, and there are other circumstances where the police see the children as perpetrators or as criminals and deal with them as such. Respondent from a voluntary organisation

For seven of the children in this review, their first contact with public authorities was either with the police because brothels were raided, or with immigration officers at borders who became suspicious of their documentation when they were being moved out of the UK by their traffickers. In some of these cases, officials and solicitors did not recognise the two key factors in their situations – that they were children and that they were potential victims of trafficking – which resulted in them being caught up in the adult criminal justice or asylum system. Three girls were sent to adult prison – two for documentation offences where they had been advised by solicitors to plead guilty, and one for an offence she still does not understand where again the advice given was to plead guilty. Two others were treated as adults and put into Yarl's Wood Immigration Removal Centre.

One of the girls who became caught up in the criminal justice system was entirely unclear about what she was being told to do and the potential implications:

I don't understand why, I don't know, I don't know what guilty means, I don't know what passport, I don't know anything so when I plead guilty. So then the solicitor asked me to plead guilty I pleaded guilty and I don't understand what guilty means, I don't know what they are speaking talking about nothing. Precious

Those who were imprisoned or held in immigration detention were released after coming to the attention of voluntary sector organisations or immigration solicitors.

Stakeholder respondents reinforced calls for children to receive a child protection response rather than one that penalises potential victims. This has been raised in previous research, such as that published by ECPAT UK and Save the Children, who report on cases where children have been removed during raids on cannabis factories and charged with drug and immigration offences (2007b). Pearce *et al* (2009) also highlighted how some police and youth offending teams may have been in a position to identify a history of trafficking within a young offender's trajectory, but that the indicators of this had not been picked up.

Responses that criminalise child victims of trafficking can be due to the widespread lack of awareness of the signs that a child has been trafficked. A study by ECPAT UK into the safe

accommodation of child victims of trafficking found that many Emergency Duty Teams (EDTs – social care staff who deal with out of hours referrals) do not have trafficking training or policies to quickly identify that they have a potentially trafficked child (2011b).

4.1.4 Private fostering arrangements

Private fostering arrangements are defined as arrangements that are made privately without the involvement of a local authority, although local authorities should be informed of each arrangement and undertake an assessment to ensure the suitability for the child. This applies to the care of a child under the age of 16 (under 18 if the child is disabled) and if the arrangement is made by the parent or close relative with the intention that it should last for 28 days or more. Private foster carers may be from the extended family such as cousin or great aunt, or unrelated to the child. By law, the parents or foster carers must notify the local authority of the private fostering arrangement at least six weeks before the date on which the arrangement is due to begin, or immediately where the arrangement is due to start within six weeks. However, only a very small percentage of placements are notified and private fostering remains a largely hidden activity (Philpot, 2001; Ofsted, 2009).

Research has pointed to the vulnerability of children in private fostering arrangements and the difficulty with detecting exploitative situations, especially with limited resources (see for example; Crawley, 2006). If a child does not attend school, come into contact with health services or children's social care, then their presence in the country remains concealed.

Research studies have illustrated cases which have caused concern for local authorities (e.g. ECPAT UK and Save the Children, 2007), and The Children's Society's research (2009) highlighted particular instances of trafficked children living in private fostering arrangements. In some cases these children were known to children's services, but they reported in interview that monitoring visits (which take place as part of normal practice) were not conducted in ways that were helpful to them, given their situation:

- Social workers did not ensure they could talk to the children in private, instead asking them questions in front of their exploiter
- They gave contact details (for follow-up help) only to the exploiter
- Visits were often cancelled or cut short
- There were frequent changes of personnel, with different social workers visiting, so the children found it difficult to build a relationship of trust which may have aided disclosure.

Such findings are consistent with those of Ofsted who reported on incomplete implementation of statutory duties in this area (2009).

Within this review, although stakeholders were not specifically asked about these issues, a number raised them and saw this as a growing problem. As one social work manager stated;

I think it is increasing – we call them privately fostered children at the moment, but their parents are nowhere to be seen in the country, they have literally been abandoned, they have only been trafficked to the country for benefit reasons.

Key findings regarding discovery and identification

- Following discovery or escape, the period immediately after is an extremely confusing and frightening time for children
- Being kept locked up or threatened or controlled prevented children from escaping, as did threats made against their family
- Children may disclose unintentionally, or may wait until they feel safe, or until they have a trusting relationship, or they may reach a point of desperation
- Children may not know that they have been trafficked or see their situation in these terms
- Trafficked children will often not have any understanding of where they are, will not know their rights and will not know how they can be protected. Not speaking English and possibly not even knowing which country they are in is also a major barrier
- A lack of awareness, understanding and training can lead to some practitioners and the police not identifying trafficked children even in situations where children have sought help
- Some trafficked children were criminalised for activities such as documentation offences and criminal acts which they were forced to engage in while being exploited
- Some trafficked children were treated as adults when discovered and were subsequently wrongly placed within the adult criminal justice system or immigration detention facilities
- Concerns were raised about private fostering arrangements and potentially trafficked children remaining hidden from view in these situations.

4.2 Trafficked children going missing

If they are identified and someone knows what they need to do with the trafficked child, then the chances of them going missing is reduced; it is not taken away. Respondent from a voluntary organisation

In this review, only one of the young people interviewed had gone missing. She ran away shortly after being brought into local authority care as her trafficker found her and she was scared of him so she disappeared. Others in the sample had not gone missing or ran away. This is almost certainly a reflection of the sample as those interviewed were in contact with voluntary sector organisations and those who are missing would not be engaging in this way with supporting organisations. Therefore, our sample does not reflect the broader picture for trafficked children. However, trafficked children going missing was identified as a major fear for stakeholders in this research and a number of reports have highlighted this as a particularly serious concern.

ECPAT UK and Save the Children (2007b) found that across three regions in England (the North West, North East and the West Midlands) of 80 reported cases of known or suspected victims of child trafficking 48 (60 per cent) went missing from social care services and were never found. CEOP (2007) estimated that 56 per cent of the 330 known or suspected trafficked children they identified in their scoping study had gone missing without trace. They also reported that children

were more likely to go missing from unsupervised or semi-supervised accommodation, and that for many of those who were later found and returned to care, there was evidence or suspicion of abuse having been perpetrated whilst they were away.

It is known that many trafficked children go missing within 72 hours of their arrival in the UK, which suggests that the child has been given some instructions prior to arrival (CEOP, 2007). An ECPAT UK report identifies that some professionals suspected that traffickers deliberately timed the arrival of children at weekends so that children are placed in less secure accommodation, leaving them vulnerable to being taken by traffickers (2011b). There is also evidence that children have gone missing long after they have arrived suggesting that maybe their trafficker eventually caught up with them, perhaps they were not originally trafficked but have been targeted by adults since their arrival (so becoming a victim of internal trafficking) or they go missing for some other unknown reason. It was reported by stakeholders that going missing is often identified as being a trigger for the authorities to suspect that the young person is a victim of trafficking. However, further research on this issue is needed.

The stakeholder interviewees spoke at considerable length of their concerns about trafficked children going missing. Many stated that this was occurring because of a lack of understanding:

Quite often it is due to a lack of awareness of what their needs are. We would advocate they get placed immediately into safe accommodation, which would be a specifically trained foster care placement that knows about the trafficking issues, or a children's home where again the staff have been trained. This is still not happening due to lack of awareness or lack of funding or lack of placements, they are getting placed in B&Bs, hostels, inappropriate accommodation. The social worker will turn up the next morning and they have disappeared, they have obviously contacted their trafficker and they have gone again.

Respondent from a voluntary organisation

A call for safe, appropriate accommodation as a means to minimise children going missing was made by all respondents.

Just putting somebody in accommodation you usually put 16 year olds in is not the answer for these young people. It may be best for them to stay locally, it may be best if they are moved 600 miles away, you have got to look at each child...you have got to have a proper plan so you think actually I have had a 'phone call from the local police station I need to make another 'phone call very quickly if necessary and get this person moved 200 miles away, I can't put them in this accommodation locally overnight that we always put them in and see if my manager is around tomorrow to discuss with him is this possible. We have got to take bold steps to keep these children safe. Respondent from a voluntary organisation

Many advocated access to specialist foster care:

I think it is important when a young person is placed in their accommodation that the carers are aware of the risks that young person has, and therefore is aware of the actions that need to be taken to keep them safe. In [local authority] we do have some carers who have had unaccompanied young people and are much more on board...because our numbers are quite small we can't have a foster carer just retained who is well trained and able to manage a potential trafficking case, because we don't have that level of resource, so there is something about training for foster carers. Social Work Manager

Some respondents felt that the Department for Education grant to deliver training for specialist carers in providing safe fostering placements for trafficked children and those victims of sexual exploitation would not be given the impetus for national roll-out.²¹

One local authority respondent explained how their partnership with a voluntary agency helped them to support their foster carers.

The advantage we have got with [the voluntary organisation we work with] is if a young person is placed in a foster placement [the voluntary organisation we work with] will go out and see that foster carer and talk them through – obviously they are involved in the safety plan – but they will talk them through why certain actions are important, what to look out for, how to respond, and will help support them in keeping that young person safe. Obviously for foster carers it is a very difficult and challenging position to be in. They have a new person in their home who may not be able to communicate, because obviously there are language barriers, but also they know they can't let them out on their own, with a high level of monitoring which is very stressful I can imagine, so it is about supporting carers to manage those stresses in that situation really. Social Work Manager

Although safer accommodation was consistently mentioned as helping to minimise the risk of children going missing, there did not appear to be an easy solution at a local level given diminishing resources. Some respondents called for a regional or national approach to solve the issue, such as having reciprocal arrangements between local authorities or other funding models.

Having local networks and local sharing of resources and knowledge I think is really helpful, and I know through some LSCBs that is happening, but if a child is picked up in [for example] Ipswich in a brothel, Ipswich should be able to pick up the 'phone to Norwich or Cambridge and very quickly get that child out of that area into a safe place, without having to go through several layers of meetings and management, resources and things like that to get a safe placement for a child, so local sharing of resources and information, both within similar agencies, so within social services, but also across agencies, involving police, youth offenders and the courts and ports and immigration officers and so on within an area would be helpful. Respondent from a voluntary organisation

Others highlighted the need to place children out of borough at least temporarily, for their own safety:

For some children it may be in that 24 to 72 hours physical removal to a long way away ensuring things are removed from them, mobile phones for example...which maybe sounds difficult for social care practitioners and others to envisage, because generally your first contact with a child is not to say 'right, let's take you away from everything you know', and remove any items from you that may have contact details and so on, and I think with a lot of children we need to be very bold in our response, they are in extreme circumstances and we have to counter that with a fairly extreme response to try and keep them safe. Respondent from a voluntary organisation

In addition, stakeholders across the voluntary and statutory sector underlined the importance of implementing an immediate 'safety plan':

21 This project is being evaluated by the University of Bedfordshire and the final evaluation report is due for publication shortly. Young people were consulted as part of this project and their views can be read in Shuker (2012).

We would again advocate that they put an immediate safety plan in place which would be no access to telephones, mobiles or landlines, no access to internet especially Facebook and other social networking sites. No access to money and 24/7 supervision at least for the first few weeks, and during that time we would be constantly working with them to say why this is happening and trying to build that trust up. Saying it is not going to be forever, they are not being punished and this is for their own safety, and this safety plan will relax over time. Respondent from a voluntary organisation

Others felt that the government needed to take a stronger line on this issue, for example:

There needs to be a lot more driven from the top down, forcing different agencies to pick up their responsibilities in this area, and you could, for example, have a national specialist foster care pilot, so children could be quickly moved from one part of the country to another to keep them safe, and given the constraints locally on resources, both in terms of upfront money and specialist foster care and so on, having a national project along those lines might be helpful. Respondent from a voluntary organisation

However, stakeholders who recommended many of these measures for directive, restrictive actions by practitioners, also suggested that these should be undertaken with effective consultation with, and one-to-one support for, the young person concerned. However, the difficulties of this were noted by respondents:

I do also think that generally in working with children and young people one would want to and one does listen to their views as much as possible, empower them, give them options, try to give them some control over their lives, but I do think trafficked children in the early stages, one has to be very wary and alert of how incapable that child may be of making decisions that are in their best interests. Of course, you are working with a child towards an end point where their interests are their best interests, but it is unrealistic at the start to think they are the same thing... It is a really skilled role to encourage a child to talk to you but also explain to them clearly and simply why you are not doing what they want, why that is not good for them, but still retain their trust and keep working with them. Respondent from a voluntary organisation

ECPAT UK found that overly restrictive safety measures can result in trafficked children feeling punished and imprisoned especially if they do not see themselves as having been exploited or at risk. They thus also argue that one way to reduce this risk is to involve children in the development of their safety plan as much as possible (ECPAT UK, 2011b).

Trafficked children are reported to have felt safer if they were provided with child-friendly instructions in different languages (written and verbal) including names, contact numbers and addresses of professionals and a basic overview of their rights in the UK (Pearce *et al*, 2009). Pearce *et al* found evidence of children subsequently using these instructions after they had been abducted or went missing. This was also a finding within this research, with a social work manager reinforcing the need for appropriate materials to support trafficked children:

If we give them information initially when they come, if they do go missing, they know where they can come back to...last year we had four of our trafficked girls return...because they knew us they came back, one of them was missing for two years.

Overall, the stakeholder interviewees (both from local authorities and the voluntary sector) made a number of key proposals to minimise the risk of trafficked children going missing including the need for:

- Quick action, even where trafficking is initially only suspected
- A safety plan immediately being put into place
- Safe accommodation either out of area and/or specialist (trained and supported) foster care as appropriate
- One-to-one intensive support for the young people to help them to understand and feel safe from the start and to form a relationship with an independent trusted adult

and to respond to incidents through:

- Effective inter-agency working
- Prioritisation and action by police and other agencies.

These findings resonate with earlier studies. For example, Pearce *et al* (2009) advocated the need for:

- Better multi-agency work (including coordinated information-sharing) between the United Kingdom Border Agency (UKBA), the police and children's services at the point of arrival focusing on securing the safety of the child to help prevent them from being abducted or going missing
- Other agencies playing their part, for example solicitors, youth workers, youth offending teams and teachers
- Facilitation of interagency working by an active LSCB subcommittee focused on trafficked children, shared training and data recording
- Providing the child with a child protection key worker (themselves supported through multi-agency work with police involvement)
- Accommodation in a place of safety, preferably in supported or supervised foster care 24 hours a day, where foster carers are trained and fully supported by a multi-disciplinary team including children's safeguarding, health and police
- Child-friendly instructions in different languages (written and verbal) including names, contact numbers and addresses of professionals, and a basic overview of children's rights in the UK.

Despite what is seen as good practice, ECPAT UK argued that there are no commonly agreed safety and protection standards across the UK for the placement of children who are suspected, or known to have been trafficked. In response to this gap, ECPAT UK (2011b) produced guidance on the principles for the safe accommodation of trafficked children, including the need to:

- Place the best interests of the child at the centre of any decision making
- Include children in the process by asking them what makes them feel safe

- Consider any physical and psychological trauma of the child
- Provide access to services to aid recovery
- Hold regular reviews and assessments of need.

Within the government's Human Trafficking Strategy (Home Office, 2011) work to reduce the number of missing children within the London Borough of Hillingdon was highlighted as an example of good practice. Hillingdon operates three levels of response:

- The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) consisting of senior managers from a range of agencies including UKBA, police, health and the local authority
- The LSCB 'Trafficking, exploitation and missing children subgroup' of middle managers whose remit is to focus on policy, procedures and training. The group meets six to eight times a year and includes representatives from CEOP, police, UKBA, voluntary organisations and local authority teams
- A multi-operational group consisting of frontline staff which meets every six weeks to discuss and assess the situation of every child reported missing within the authority. The group uses and applies the London LSCB trafficking toolkit to help identify trafficking issues and create safeguarding plans.

This approach has reportedly led to a significantly reduced number of potentially trafficked children going missing in the local authority.

Research findings on the effectiveness of previous attempts to reduce the numbers of trafficked children going missing show mixed results. The difficulties and complexities of this, however, should not be underestimated. One local authority tried to tackle the issue through the provision of 24 hour surveillance on arrival; yet still the young people went missing (ECPAT UK and Save the Children, 2007).

However, Pearce *et al* (2009) concluded in their research that there is a clear argument for a child to be allocated a key worker when they are identified as possibly having been trafficked. In the local authorities in their study, the LSCBs who were well informed and equipped to respond to a trafficking case, allocated a key worker to support the child through to safety. In these instances the number of missing children was reduced. The practitioners they spoke to advocated that each LSCB should have a trained and supported practitioner who is available to respond to potential cases of trafficked children and who could meet with the child and engage them. With the assistance of an interpreter this practitioner tries to establish trust and stays with the child until they are placed in safety and a permanent key worker is allocated. Practitioners had also recommended that an independent legal guardian would be allocated to the case, providing advocacy for the child. It is also often asserted that appointing a guardian might help avoid the need for a child to repeat their story many times to different professionals, which was described by some practitioners as abusive in itself. The Joint APPG Inquiry into children who run away or go missing from care made a specific recommendation that a *legal advocate with parental responsibility should be appointed for all unaccompanied migrant children*.²²

22 Conducted by two All Party Parliamentary Groups and supported by The Children's Society <http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/what-we-do/policy-and-lobbying/parliamentary-work/appg-inquiry-children-who-go-missing-or-run-away>

Respondents in this research felt that the immediate provision of intensive, one-to-one support for these children by an adult who the child can form a trusting relationship with, and who could help them to make sense of the different processes and professionals that they encounter, would reduce the risk of the child going missing.

I also think from the very start for a young person to have a trusted adult is so important, because so many adults will become involved in this young person's life, from potentially social workers, the police, the solicitors, the courts, foster carers, key workers, independent reviewing officers and so on, and the child is likely to have a very confused understanding of who these adults are and what their role is, and so if from as close to the start as possible there is one adult which remains with them throughout all these processes and advises them, I think the child is much more likely to trust them and believe they will help them in the situation they are in and be in a better position to keep that child safe. Respondent from a voluntary organisation

4.2.1 The response to trafficked children when they go missing

Within the ECPAT UK and Save the Children study, concerns were raised by participants about the perceived low priority given to cases of child trafficking by the police (2007b). In their study police were criticised for being the least involved of all agencies and for not giving sufficient attention to cases where children had gone missing. Pearce *et al* also highlight practitioner concerns that the cases of missing children be kept alive by trying to locate their whereabouts, and that this could only be achieved through active multi-agency working and record keeping. They concluded that practice in this area improved where designated key workers from different agencies (welfare and law) worked together (2009). Professionals interviewed in this research also emphasised the importance of multi-agency working to react to trafficked children going missing:

We respond well when they are missing in the sense we hold regular multi agency meetings and had a young person who was missing for a considerable amount of time...he was located, and it was by virtue of us holding ongoing meetings that this young man was highlighted and then picked up, because it was a stop and search thing with the police, this was the feedback we got back from the police, if we hadn't continued to have the meetings, they were likely to have just let him go. Social Work Manager

Immediately they go missing we report them as missing to the police, so there is immediate action trying to look at any evidence, like a CCTV camera, you can see if they have been picked up by someone...because some of that can be intelligence that can be used by the police later on. Social Work Manager

However, as in previous research, a number of interviewees expressed concern about a perceived low priority that the police, and other agencies, may put on this issue, and how it should be treated as abduction:

The other side of it is what you do if they go missing, and one has to treat it as abduction almost. The police and local authority response needs to be akin to a child who you know has been taken, as opposed to a child who has gone missing, because children go missing from foster care the entire time. The police response is presumably not particularly pro-active because with indigenous children a lot of the time you know where they are, they are just missing from the placement – they are not missing – because you know the kind of places they are likely to be,

but children from overseas who have been trafficked of course don't have uncles, aunts, cousins, friends whose houses you know they will be at. Respondent from a voluntary organisation

Once more, the importance of taking a national approach to this issue was highlighted:

The other thing I would say is having a national database, because children move from one local authority to another, and another local authority would not necessarily know that a child that was looked after has gone missing from another local authority, so it is a kind of a national database where we can make it mandatory on local authorities to check with their office to see if a child has been known to any other areas. Social Work Manager

4.2.2 The UK as a trafficking transit country

One issue which has received less attention was highlighted by ECPAT UK and Save the Children, the issue of trafficking children out of the UK (2007b). They argued that concerns about missing children must be examined in parallel to this issue as children can be trafficked both within and out of the country. Their report calls for the role of the UK as a trafficking transit country to be explored further. As discussed earlier, some of the young people in this research were discovered when their traffickers were trying to move them out of the UK, so our findings support ECPAT UK's call for more work to improve understanding and awareness of this aspect of child trafficking.

Key findings concerning trafficked children going missing

- Trafficked children going missing are a major concern for practitioners.
- Interviewees reported that a lack of awareness of trafficking meant some children were not properly protected, supervised, accommodated and supported, and went missing.
- A lack of safe accommodation or specialist trained foster carers was reported to be leading to children being placed in inappropriate placements.
- There was agreement about what can help to minimise the risk. This included quick action based on suspicion, a multi-agency safety plan, safe accommodation, trained and supported foster carers and one-to-one intensive support for the child and the forming of a trusting relationship with an independent adult.
- Some respondents felt that tackling this issue was beyond the scope of local level provision and there needed to be a regional/national response such as reciprocal arrangements, new funding models or a national specialist foster care programme.
- Respondents saw the value in the training of specialist foster carers funded by the Department for Education and wanted this to be rolled out nationally.
- Respondents reported that a higher priority needed to be given to trafficked children who go missing.
- Recommendations included the need for:
 - Improved multi-agency responses to trafficked children going missing

- Trafficked children who go missing to be treated as cases of abduction
- The introduction of a national database to record missing trafficked children.
- Trafficked children are known to have used written information given to them by professionals before they went missing. They have subsequently used this information to facilitate a return to the local authority.
- Respondents were concerned that the UK's role as a transit country for trafficking children needs to be specifically considered in terms of child protection.

4.3 Use of current guidance and multi-agency working

As already discussed early identification of suspected trafficking is essential for effectively safeguarding children. Child trafficking toolkits and NRM guidance contain a list of indicators to support professionals in the initial stages of identification. Respondents within this review considered these helpful, however, previous reports have highlighted that there is little understanding of how the indicators should be incorporated into an assessment process, predict risk or help in determining which services would best meet children's needs (Rigby, 2011). One interviewee within this review agreed stating that:

We do a range of specialist assessments for young people, but at the moment we don't have a standardised one for young people who have been trafficked or suspected of being trafficked – so that is potentially an area of development for us but also nationally as well.
Social Work Manager

The expert stakeholder seminar attendees considered our findings in the context of a discussion around good practice for working with trafficked children. The consensus was that there was a need to apply fundamental principles and elements of good practice that relate to social care for children generally – i.e. to regard victims of trafficking as a child protection issue as the primary focus. This echoes the approach advocated in a study of work with refugee and asylum seeking children (Newbigging and Thomas, 2011), where six key principles for practice were identified, including:

- Using a person-centred approach
- Respecting cultural identity
- Promoting social inclusion
- Partnership working.

Newbigging and Thomas also identified 14 nominations of good practice in the social care of young asylum seekers and refugees in relation to reception and assessment, safe accommodation, personalised provision, capacity building, a focus on emotional well-being, social inclusion and safeguarding. These general principles and approaches can be seen to be equally applicable to trafficked children. They concluded that there are six critical elements that provide a foundation for good practice; organisational commitment to promoting the well-being of this group, development of strong multi-agency partnerships at a strategic and operational

level, development of a local strategy based on a joint strategic needs assessment, methods for involving service users in the development of appropriate services, workforce development, and monitoring and review.

Other studies have suggested that better assessments are made when child protection staff work alongside immigration staff, for example having combined teams based in airports (Pearce *et al.*, 2009).

Given the complexity of trafficking the need for multi-agency working is paramount, yet little is known about how agencies are working together, when and in what ways they can be effective. As already described, some local authorities have multi-agency groups dedicated to trafficking, which are reported to have made a significant difference in supporting trafficked children. Pearce *et al* reported that practitioners noted improvements in safety for children when: multi-agency agreements were formalised through joint local protocols, checklists monitored the work undertaken by different agencies, there was a sub-committee or specialist group focusing on trafficking issues within the borough and there was a designated safeguarding trafficked children worker who could offer advice and consultancy on casework undertaken by key workers (2009). They also report that when these things are not in place practitioners can feel daunted by the range of needs presented by a trafficked child, by the dangers faced from organised crime, and by their potential failure to prevent harm.

One of the aims of this review was to explore how well agencies were working together to respond to child trafficking and whether current guidance, available materials and processes were in widespread use. The local authority survey therefore asked a series of questions, as to whether areas had:

- A child trafficking multi-agency strategic group – and, if so, who was part of the group and what its objectives were
- A child trafficking multi-agency operational group – and, if so, who was part of this group and what its objectives were
- A joint local strategy on child trafficking
- Included it in their local needs assessment processes.

Local authorities were also asked to identify areas they felt required attention in their work around child trafficking. 27 local authorities responded as follows:

- 14 had a multi-agency strategic group and six said one was ‘in development’, seven did not have one
- Eight had an multi-agency operational group and six said one was ‘in development’, 13 did not have one
- Seven had a joint local strategy and seven said one was ‘in development’, 12 did not have one
- Four had included child trafficking in local needs assessment processes – 12 planned to do so in the future (and seven said they did ‘not know’).

There was no pattern to suggest that it was mostly those local authorities with recent experience of supporting trafficked children (i.e. within the last calendar year) that had developed this work. Some local authorities with small numbers of trafficked children had seen it as an important issue.

Reported membership of multi-agency strategic groups varied widely – as shown in Table 1 (below) – with key agencies (children’s social care, police, health and education) not present in a number of areas, only half having representation from education or youth offending teams, and small proportions having mental health or voluntary sector personnel on board.

Table 1: Membership of multi-agency strategic groups covering trafficked children’s issues (N = 14)

	Number of authorities
Children’s social care	11
Health	10
Police	10
Education	7
Youth Offending Teams	7
UKBA	5
Voluntary Sector	4
CAMHs (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services)	2
Community and Faith groups	2
LA children missing education teams	2
Adult social care	1
AMHs (Adult Mental Health Services)	0
Transition Team	0
Do not know membership	3
Other*	3

*Other included housing, specialist health resource (sex industry), youth service, commissioners and residential providers

Multi-agency strategic groups were seen as an important approach by the stakeholders interviewed. As one respondent stated ‘X [Local authority] have a sub-group of their LSCB which concentrates solely on trafficking and that is a good model for all local authorities to take forward because if someone owns something, then something happens.’ Survey respondents were asked to describe the current objectives of this multi-agency strategy group. Few supplied this information, however, it appeared that many were focusing on child sexual exploitation and trafficking was subsumed within this. Although this is of course important and a positive development, there is a danger as described before, that focusing on trafficking for sexual exploitation alone could mean cases of trafficking for other exploitative reasons goes undetected.

Membership of operational groups was also variable – though in this case children’s social care was omnipresent (see Table 1). Again key agencies such as the police, education, health, mental health and missing education teams were not present in a number of areas.

Table 2: Membership of multi-agency operational groups covering trafficked children’s issues (N = 8)

	Number of authorities
Children’s social care	8
Police	6
Education	5
Youth Offending Teams	4
LA children missing education teams	4
Health	3
Voluntary Sector	2
CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health services)	1
UKBA	2
Adult social care	1
AMHs (Adult Mental Health Services)	1
Transition Team	0
Community and Faith groups	0
Do not know membership	0
Other*	2

*Other included housing, youth service, sexual health worker

Reported objectives of these groups included to:

- Identify individual cases
- Monitor missing unaccompanied children
- Ensure there is a named officer allocated to all cases
- Ensure procedures and processes are adhered to
- Oversee use of the NRM
- Maintain a record of the number of referrals
- Analyse data to identify trends
- Report on operational issues to the strategic group.

Those who responded to the question on what else they felt they needed to do identified many issues for attention:

- Devising local protocols and developing local strategies
- Updating needs assessments
- Reviewing their response in the first 72 hours following discovery
- Providing training

- Improving awareness around private fostering arrangements
- Developing feedback exercises with the young people being supported
- Working on discrimination towards unaccompanied children seeking asylum
- Developing more community resources to meet the needs of this group
- Developing better recording systems to identify these children.

Although it is not possible to claim that these findings are representative of the circumstances across the country, they do give some indication of the present situation with regard to responding to trafficked children. It is also difficult to know the degree to which this shows progress and, though any positive developments are to be welcomed, there remain concerns about the degree to which service planning and provision is joined-up.

Stakeholder interviewees reported that multi-agency working varies and often depends on good levels of understanding and awareness, quality and reach of training and the amount of importance and commitment placed on the issue by an area. Information supplied from LSCB business manager indicated that they had endeavoured to undertake a thorough approach to this issue in their strategy. It should be noted that this authority is not an area which had been supporting particularly high numbers of trafficked children in the last calendar year, however, it appears that they prioritised the issue.

We have a joint working protocol for trafficked children which includes an introduction to trafficking, principles, identifying trafficked and exploited children, use of Common Assessment Framework (CAF), children at risk of or experiencing significant harm including referral to social care and their expected response, The National Referral Mechanism (Stages 1–4), issues to consider when working with trafficked children – including trafficked children who are LAC (looked after children i.e. cared for by the local authority), information sharing, role of Safeguarding Board and Contact Lists of Agencies SPOC (Single Point of Contact) within each agency within the borough and national and international help lines.

A small number of other authorities stated that they have put into place protocols, procedures and training so that they can spot the signs of potentially trafficked children and be prepared should the situation arise.

We have a Children Services internal procedure on supporting unaccompanied asylum seeking children and within that is a section on trafficking and links to the London checklist [London Safeguarding Trafficked Children Toolkit] and things like that, and advice to staff on what to do if they have concerns about someone being trafficked. We have that and we also have the children missing from care procedure, and again in there we have made particular reference to unaccompanied asylum seeking children who have been accommodated by the local authority. We have highlighted the additional risk there of going missing by virtue of being trafficked and again we have all the information about what staff should do if they have those worries and concerns. Social Work Manager

Another authority which had very small numbers of trafficked children highlighted their approach. They had placed importance on the issue and had thus formed a partnership with a voluntary organisation so that they could learn from those with wider expertise in this area.

What we know for [X local authority] is our trafficking numbers are probably relatively small compared to some other local authorities but again I think we have been pretty good at getting on board with the whole agenda really, and as I say we have been commissioning [voluntary organisation] for eighteen months or two years so we have been aware of the needs for a fair period of time and have actively tried to put something in place to support staff. Social Work Manager

Our staff experience is quite limited compared to [voluntary organisation] staff. As soon as we have somebody – traditionally who is probably at the police station – we are making a call to [voluntary organisation] straight away to say we seem to have a new arrival, then we look at how they can be involved and how quickly, and then again they support us to put a safety plan in place so that is done asap. So at least the child can come out of the police station and be placed and everyone has an idea what they are doing in that first 24 hours and then obviously what is going to happen after that. I think [voluntary organisation] is probably our greatest source of advice and support. Social Work Manager

Survey respondents were asked to report on what they felt had worked well locally for them. The following areas of practice were identified:

- Training in identification, private fostering and safeguarding across faiths and cultures
- Close and effective joint working with local police
- A sub-group of the local safeguarding board whose members meet on sexual exploitation and trafficking
- Good quality strategy meetings for individual cases involving the police, health and social care
- Appointing specialist workers (e.g. to work with the Roma community) or commissioning voluntary sector organisations to provide training or specialist support to young people
- Developing a private fostering communications strategy across LSCB partners.

Stakeholder interviewees, however, stated that there was still misunderstanding around what response trafficked children should receive:

Some local authorities work well with the UKBA, some just do not work with UKBA. A lot of local authorities seem to have it in their heads that this is an immigration issue, which it is not, it is a child abuse issue. So they will defer and they will think the decision needs to be made immigration wise, whereas that is of secondary importance compared to the child abuse issues. Police health and education generally know very little about this. Outside specialist police teams knowledge of trafficking is poor, particularly in the local CAIT team (the Child Abuse Investigation Team). They are trained generally to work with cases of physical abuse, criminal neglect and sexual abuse, trafficking and the kind of offences that are related to trafficking are unusual to them, and therefore they are not trained in the evidence gathering and prosecution process. Respondent from a voluntary organisation

It really is about the UKBA and children and family social services working much more closely together along with the police, and then alongside them bringing in the other

agencies that you need, which is making sure there is knowledge in health and education about spotting children. That is all you want them to do, is spot the child abuse...

Respondent from a voluntary organisation

One respondent indicated that they were pleased that HM Revenue and Customs had been brought into the frame of a multi-agency approach in some areas, reflecting a concern that other respondents shared about a possible rise in the trafficking of children for benefit fraud:

The other group that has been brought into this process recently is HM Revenue and Customs. There is so much benefit fraud going on with trafficked children, and they were not involved in Working Together, no one thought of it at the time – they are very willing – but they have come to the table a bit late. Respondent from a voluntary organisation

In 2011, the Ministry of Justice published the third edition of its comprehensive guidance which describes good practice in interviewing victims and witnesses, and preparing them to give best evidence in court (Ministry of Justice, 2011). This guidance details how to support children and vulnerable adults through the process of providing evidence and being a witness in court cases, and it was felt that some of the practice recommended illustrates ways of multi-agency working that could benefit those working with trafficked children. As one respondent stated:

I am aware through her work of circumstances where she has been involved in ABE (Achieving Best Evidence) interviews where my colleague, the local authority social services, the police, the solicitor, everybody has worked together in the interest of the young person, so the young person in this example would only have to go through one interview to get to the information that is necessary. So we are aware of circumstances where all agencies are talking with each other, thinking who is best to go with that child, what will happen to that child after that appointment, who does what with that information. Conversely, examples of not talking to each other, where children are detained, where a local authority thinks it is not their responsibility because they think it is a young person who is nothing to do them, where we spend huge amounts of time trying to get agencies to think about the child at the centre of this. Respondent from a voluntary organisation

Although we did not specifically ask about the NRM, a number of the stakeholder interviewees were keen to discuss it, possibly because they felt frustrated with the process and did not see it providing support to the children they worked with:

I use the NRM... To be honest I don't find the National Referral Mechanism process particularly helpful right now just because a lot of the NRMs I am completing are coming back as negative results, because they are saying that the exploitation element can't be proved. So although you can prove that the young person has come in to the UK illegally through what you call 'agents' or 'traffickers' ...and they have been exploited on the journey, either sexually exploited or physically beaten, money taken off them, so on and so on, you can't prove the exploitation element once they are in the UK very easily – so for that reason they are coming back negative which is very frustrating, because you know, or you certainly suspect, that exploitation is occurring. Respondent from a voluntary organisation

In terms of the NRM it is meant to be a support mechanism as well, because if you are identified as a trafficked victim through that process then you are meant to get support from that, but I think there are faults with it – the fact that the 'exploitative element' is very difficult

to prove in the UK – and because of that so many potential victims are not being identified and not getting the support. Respondent from a voluntary organisation

Stakeholder interviewees also acknowledged the challenges posed by the need for good interagency cooperation to respond well to trafficking, highlighting the critical need for comprehensive training and effective protocols. The example below relates to working with the police:

One of the difficulties can be that, for example, if we are working with the police you never know who is going to be on duty and it is about being confident if they came across a young person about having that awareness about trafficking so that they respond in an appropriate manner. So if we have a new arrival with a high risk of going missing in the first 24 or 48 hours, it is really key we get the police on board in terms of the safety plan and what their response is going to be if that young person goes missing. Social worker in a local authority

Our findings amplify those of other studies around the difficulties of multi-agency working with children. Jago *et al.* (2011), in their research on safeguarding young people from sexual exploitation, indicated that only a quarter of LSCBs in England had implemented government guidance. Where the guidance had been followed, there were examples of developing and innovative practice. The same study revealed a lack of effective information sharing between LSCBs and the police to identify and track young people who go missing, the use of unsafe accommodation (and the increased vulnerability this places a child under), and a general lack of awareness and specific training.

Although the young people interviewed for this scoping study could not directly comment on multi-agency working, their experiences of continually having to repeat their story to a multitude of professionals, and the associated stress this could cause them, indicates that improved multi-agency working could be of significant benefit to them.

Key findings concerning current guidance and multi-agency working

- Child trafficking toolkits and NRM guidance containing indicators of trafficking were considered helpful
- Some respondents, however highlighted that there was little understanding of how the indicators should be incorporated into the assessment process, used to predict risk or to determine the most appropriate services
- It was reported that good social care for trafficked children should be about a duty to protect these children, rather than focusing on them as being trafficked
- Multi-agency working was identified to be highly dependent on the importance placed on the issue by local authorities
- Few local authorities had developed multi-agency strategic or operational groups focusing on trafficking. Even fewer had developed local joint strategies on trafficking or undertaken local needs assessments. Thus very few local authorities were implementing current guidance

- Multi-agency joint training was seen as helpful. However, multi-agency working depended on a shared understanding and proper training across agencies, otherwise it could fail
- Some respondents expressed frustration with the NRM process and did not see it providing support to trafficked children
- Respondents recommended that gathering information from children should be compliant with Achieving Best Evidence guidance
- Trafficked children had to repeat their story multiple times to multiple agencies, often causing them distress.

4.4 Support for trafficked children

It is interesting we often stick this label on it of human trafficking, but often that is just their life. Respondent from a voluntary organisation

Despite positive work by individual professionals...agencies often struggled to deal with the additional complexities and needs of trafficking victims, both in terms of identification and in the provision of specific services for children. (Rigby, 2011, p328)

The rest of this section presents findings from our research on particular aspects of support. Other reports have highlighted the effects of trafficking on individual children – an important issue to consider when reviewing how they are treated by the professionals and systems they may come into contact with. The impact on a child of being trafficked is multi-dimensional. Professionals often struggle to recognise the abuse and trauma of trafficking, perhaps because of the different situations in which it may come to light, but also because of the different reactions of individual children, due to their own resilience or the presence of some protective factors in their particular situation (Rigby, 2011).

Practitioners have reported the following observations on trafficked children whom they have worked with: low self-esteem, lack of confidence, sense of loss, distrust, naivety, passivity, shame, depression, isolation, disillusionment and an unwillingness to show emotion. Physical symptoms such as nightmares, headaches, stomach ulcers and inability to sleep have also been reported (The Children's Society, 2009). Research by Chase *et al* on the emotional well-being and mental health of separated children in the UK found high levels of need (2008), as did Kohli in his study (2007).

There are gaps in evidence around the needs of trafficked children. Zimmerman *et al* (2006) explored support issues of 207 women who had been trafficked for sexual exploitation, or who had been sexually abused while working in domestic service. 24 of the sample were children aged between 15 and 17 years old. The girls and women in this study had experienced extreme sexual, physical and emotional violence in their home countries prior to being trafficked and continued violence during the trafficking process. The report makes many health and social care recommendations, including the need for a period of recovery and reflection following being identified as trafficked, the need for safe housing, long-term psychological support and education.

4.4.1 Trafficking as a child protection issue

In trafficking cases, stakeholder interviewees in our study repeatedly spoke of the need to recognise the situation as one requiring a safeguarding response:

*It is seen as an immigration issue, it is a problem, child protection needs are not necessarily coming first. We still get minors coming through and being sent straight back without any kind of assessment, reaching the port boundary for instance, but not on the land, and they have just sent them straight back where they have come from without any assessment, and I don't think that is good child protection practice at all.*²³ Respondent from a voluntary organisation

If they don't see child trafficking as a form of child abuse they are not going to give it a proper response, if they don't think children from the EU or from other parts of the world are entitled under The Children Act to be protected and safeguarded, they won't do it, they won't recognise it. Respondent from a voluntary organisation

They should really be seeking Section 31 care orders on these children to give them parental responsibility and then they will become wholly and legally the responsibility of the local authority in the way that other children in care are. That is part of the system now, and that is what should be pushed for, that all these children become subject of care proceedings... introducing a joint Immigration and Family Court, the family court are charged to make a decision in the best interest of the child. Respondent from a voluntary organisation

Other research has highlighted this issue. Pearce *et al* (2009) reported in detail practitioner concerns that safeguarding the child should be of paramount importance overriding concerns of immigration status and age. They also raised concerns that children trafficked from abroad might not receive the same rights and treatment as children born in the UK, even though they are entitled to do so by law.

Crawley (2006) highlights how some social workers and other practitioners assume that the provisions of the Children Acts (1989 and 2004), do not apply to children subject to immigration control. Rigby (2011) also highlights this issue in his research, stating that practitioners felt that the NRM was not considered to be aiding identification and recovery because asylum issues took precedence, even when multiple care needs were identified as a consequence of movement and exploitation. Rigby also questions the efficacy of the present framework to adequately protect trafficked children when child protection practice is focused on gathering forensic evidence, prioritising cases and predicting risk, whilst conversely, the asylum process is designed around speedy decision-making.

ECPAT UK and Save the Children (2007) voiced similar concerns, especially the association between child trafficking and asylum issues. They point out that, although some children who are or who become trafficked may claim asylum when they arrive in the UK, many others will enter differently, for example on EEA (European Economic Area) passports or on visas.

²³ For further evidence on this issue, please see The Office of the Children's Commissioner for England's report (2012) *Landing in Dover. The Immigration Process Undergone by Unaccompanied Children arriving in Kent.*

Stakeholder respondents within our review argued that there is a risk that if the responsibility for child victims of trafficking only falls on asylum teams within the local authority, who may lack specific skills in safeguarding children and young people, many vulnerable young people will go undetected, including those travelling on EEA documents, accompanied children and those who come into the country bypassing immigration controls. Where children have been trafficked using false documents, it has been illustrated by examples discussed previously in this report that the documentation offence can be put at the forefront of the interactions with the individual leading to arrest and imprisonment, rather than being seen as an indicator of potential trafficking.

A concern that child protection support is being compromised by trafficked children's uncertain immigration status has also been put forward, for example by ECPAT UK and Save the Children (2007). Their study of trafficking in three regions of England exposed frustration by social care services and voluntary organisations that a precedence was put on immigration matters over a child's best interests, leaving these professionals struggling to effectively support a child who may still be at high risk of being further exploited. In particular the ability to plan and provide for a trafficked young person's safety and well-being is compromised because of a lack of residency beyond 18 years or younger in some cases. With the majority of trafficked children being identified at age 16 or 17 years, the services available to them including accommodation, counselling and legal advice are extremely limited. This is further explored in the section on transition.

4.4.2 Age assessments

Like other separated young people, trafficked children may be assessed by social care services to determine their age, and thus their entitlement to children's services. Existing practices around age assessments have frequently been challenged and their reliability questioned, and research has shown that age disputes can cause substantial stress to young people and impact negatively on their mental health and well-being (See for example; Crawley, 2006; Chase *et al*, 2007; The Children's Society, 2008; Brownlees and Yazdani, 2012; Refugee Council, 2012; Coram Children's Legal Centre, 2013).

Some practitioners who were interviewed noted that trafficked children may be at a particular disadvantage when undergoing age assessments. Practitioners highlight how difficult age assessments can be especially for young people exploited through trafficking because these young people can appear more mature than they are, perhaps because they have had to look after themselves from a young age, or because of the effect on them of other experiences including being exploited.

When stakeholder respondents in this research were asked whether young people they supported had been subjected to age assessments, a typical response was:

Yes, they are. Quite often more than one age assessment as well. They get age disputed, they have another age assessment. In fact one young person that I have been supporting has been at risk of having three, which we have managed to stop, purely because we have threatened to contact welfare solicitors, because we think it is a bit inhumane to put a young person through quite a strenuous process a third time. Respondent from a voluntary organisation

A solicitor explained their experience, illustrating that disputing young people's age was a very common experience:

Over the years I have represented a lot of trafficked children where the traffickers have facilitated their arrival by using visas, and I can say probably 60 or more over ten years, out of all of them there was only one occasion where an age dispute didn't arise.

However, this was not the practice everywhere, as one local authority indicated that they prioritise child protection over age disputes:

All the children we have, immediately they come to us they are looked after children, even if there is a dispute about their age, if they are trafficked, it is the trafficking bit we are doing, the age is the secondary thing that we are not worrying about at that time. Social Work Manager

Ten of the young people that were interviewed for this research had their age disputed. All of them, eventually, were assessed to be children. The impact of being treated as an adult for all young people can be significant, but for this group of children where there may be additional risks around re-trafficking, this process can expose them to harm not experienced by others who have their age disputed.

As mentioned previously, some children in this research ended up in adult prison and immigration detention because their age was wrongly identified. Some described how the authorities took the age on their false documents to be their real age (even when being prosecuted for documentation offences), or they took that adult age to indicate that they were over 18 years, even when there was a suspicion or belief that the young people had been trafficked. A 16 year old boy explained how the false age on the passport, which said he was 37, was used to doubt the initial belief of the Home Office and the local authority that he was a child.

Social services assess me and because the Home Office said yes, at first they believe my age. But then they ask me about my passport, I say yeah this passport, the man that help me, he is the one that just give me the passport when I was coming to the plane here. And he asked me, this is the name you are going to say, because my name is [different to the one on the passport], and the date of birth that makes me 37 years of age, he say that this is the age what I was, but I didn't know the age that the passport was too high. Because I didn't look at the age, I just look at the photograph and the name. So when I get to the Home Office I hand everything to the man that come get me. So he was looking at me, I didn't know that he was looking at the age of passport, and looking at me he didn't ask me about my age he just say who is the one that is going to collect me after they have finished asking me questions, and I say the name is on the paper. They take like three weeks then they put me back to the Home Office and fingerprint me, they show the passport I came with. The Home Office said we believed that you were 16 but now we are not going to accept you as 16. But however we are going to take you to social services, if they believe that you are 16 we will accept that. Social services did not accept me when they heard about the passport. Adebayo

This is just one example of a child's credibility being questioned because of the passport provided by a trafficker. In this sample, we know that at least half of the children travelled on false documents that stated their ages were over 18, so this is not an uncommon occurrence and therefore something that officials should look out for and question. Some also carried passports from countries that were not their own. Stakeholders also identified this as an issue in relation to age.

It is always when they have been caught with a document, obviously a fraudulent document that has been given to them, that gives them an age as older, maybe 20 and they are 16, maybe 30 and they make them dress older, you often find most of the people were in prison and it was after a while, maybe their criminal lawyer, having spoken to these people they may have deduced this person can't be 20 for instance, or can't be 30, they have asked for an age assessment to be done... it doesn't help either, because the young people feel that no one believes them, no one believes their story, they don't understand what an age assessment is, they don't understand why they have to prove to someone they are what say they are, and it does have a psychological impact too. Respondent from a voluntary organisation

I so often have cases where I think the child has been remarkably consistent about the account they have given to different authorities and to social services on more than one occasion, and yet the main reason the local authority is saying they don't accept their age is because they have said they have been inconsistent, well where? It is not even as if one has to explain away major inconsistencies because of their age or trauma or whatever, often that are really minor inconsistencies. Solicitor

Voluntary organisations and welfare solicitors helped those who were assessed as over 18 to successfully challenge these decisions, but this can take a long time and there were examples in this sample of children spending protracted periods in adult accommodation. One girl, who was being looked after by the local authority whilst the age assessment was completed, felt that she was going to be left totally unsupported when one of her age assessments deemed her to be over 18.

Social service asked my foster mum to throw me out on the street. They say because now they done the age assessment and also because you are illegal immigrant that they don't want to have anything to do with me. Christine

It is vitally important that age assessments are carried out with care and consideration because of the consequences for children being incorrectly assessed as adults. As a solicitor explained, where children are being treated by social services as being over 18, CAMHS are not available to them and this can have severe implications for a child's mental health if the age dispute takes a long time. In addition, it was reported by a number of stakeholders that the impact of the process meant that some young people disengaged with services, and thus could be placing themselves at increased risk.

Some local authority interviewees noted that decisions can be made in stressful environments such as police cells and based upon pre-judgements.

Generally what will happen if the young person is picked up by the police or UK Border Agency, they will come and ask us to do an age assessment before they will release the young person from the police station, which is hardly ideal because you have got someone who is absolutely terrified, who doesn't know what is going on, doesn't know who you are, but we do the best we can. How reliable it is is really hard to say. Social Worker

There is a degree, 'oh they have to be at least 29' before you have even gone out of the door, and that is not the way to look at it. There was a judgement called the Merton judgement, which laid down some guidance, one of the things it says is you shouldn't make

an assumption that the person either is or isn't a child before you have done the assessment. Social Worker

Two of the children in this research talked in detail about their experiences of undergoing age assessments, or of having their age and identity questioned by local authorities. One girl felt that the process was carried out in such a way that she did not have the chance to answer the questions properly, and another was interviewed in a way designed to question her credibility and certainly did not give the impression that the social worker was there to provide care and support.

[In the age assessment]...the woman she speak to me she was so horrible. When I was explaining she is like she doesn't even want to listen because she was, even before I will explain, she was asking me another question and before I explain she was asking me question. She will not wait for me to explain it finally, she is saying, she was pressing me. So after the conversation she didn't want to listen to anything that I was saying. Mariam

At another point when I had a new social worker and she came to my house...[She said] give me your real name your real date of birth and where you are really coming from. I thought she would have everything on the system before coming and I was like 'sorry?'. I was thinking where do you think I am from? She was like, well I do not think you are from [the country you have stated]. If you're from that country tell me exactly who is the president. And I was like how am I going to know? I don't live there, I'm not interested in politics, I don't know whoever is the president or what is going on in my country...It was very stressful for me like all the time she said well you know what I don't believe your age I don't believe your name and I don't believe where you are saying you are coming from. I said the immigration officer believe me so whatever you say it will not matter because I don't really care....And she was like we can offer you £5,000 for you to go back to your country... She is still my social worker she still don't believe me. But you know what I don't really care anymore. Hope

4.4.3 Support given by social services

All of the children we interviewed had been supported by their local authority and had been allocated social workers/key workers to address their needs, but it should be noted that many of them were unclear about the role and function of their social worker.

Only a minority of our sample were happy with the overall care and support provided by their social worker (or one of the several social workers they had). Some interviewees expressed gratitude that there was a system in place to support them, and for the performance of individual social workers, but this was often tempered by descriptions of bad experiences and relationships the children had often experienced, as shown in these responses:

Are you happy with your social worker?

Yes, even though sometimes I am not all that happy you know because they didn't do what I wanted them to do but I am really happy that I had them because they have supported me a lot, because unlike other countries like Africa I don't think nobody would have help like that. And they helped me you know when I needed shelter and money and to feed myself and that.

Have they always been supportive to you, the Social Services?

Yes, they have but sometimes they just you know sometimes when they don't do their job you know. Joy

I had good support from social service, like in the care, like education support, housing, just like I said before, except for the bad social worker that I had. He was really disappointing but like the one I am with now she is ok. She always call me if I have a problem. Adebayo

Criticisms about social workers centred around a lack of contact and support, not being listened to and not doing the things they should be doing. Having been subject to age assessments and the questioning this involves, some young people found it difficult to subsequently maintain a positive relationship with their social workers.

The whole experience with social services looking after me, I didn't really trust them at all, even later when they accepted me [as a child]. Anne

In many instances, children had been in contact with multiple social workers or key workers, so did not benefit from continuity of care. Christine reported having had six or seven different social workers and she lost track of who was who. The problems resulting from the lack of a consistent social worker were poignantly described by one child:

When I went to social services I didn't have a social worker and my case was from one person to another person so I didn't really know who I'm gonna go talk to because I didn't have no-one who really knew my case and the only people that I did know on that time was [two workers from voluntary sector organisations], and it was these two people that helped me the most on that time...they just put me on duty so anything I need, I need to talk to someone, every time someone different, and obviously they don't know my case, they don't know about what I really need, they don't take me seriously. And another thing, because of my language it was so difficult for me to try to express my feelings ... emotionally I was broken, I didn't have no feelings at all, I didn't know how my life would end up, I didn't know what I'm gonna do, I didn't know who, I didn't know what I was any more, and then just going to see one people, someone, and the next time someone else and tell them can I talk to them and they say don't worry, everything going to be fine, just go back home and we gonna call you, we gonna find someone to take care of you. When they find the person to take care of me the person really didn't do nothing, it didn't really change nothing. Josephine

As described earlier in the report, some of the children interviewed did not know which country they were in and many had their lives strictly controlled by their traffickers and exploiters. They had come from countries that were very different to the UK, and therefore may have been confused about what it was like to live here. One child described how she did not receive the help she wanted from her key worker to help her navigate the new world she found herself in, so she ended up teaching herself the things she needed to know:

She was really bad. My keyworker was really bad...social services just sent me [to an unfamiliar area] and told the keyworker to take me to the closest Tesco's or Sainsbury's so that I could do some shopping for my weekly so that I could have some food at home. So she took me to Tesco's and I remember that she used to make me feel like she didn't want people to see her with me, like, I was in, probably dressing inappropriate to walk with her or probably I wasn't good looking, I don't know, but she just walk like she don't want people to see me with her, like, she's on her phone and she's far away from me, and I'm in a new country where I don't know even how to say 'rice' or how to buy things and she's just leaving me by myself. I just looked around and get things that I think, oh I could eat this, things like bread, drinks and things like that but...she was the worst I think. When I used to

tell her to take me...she never took me to GP, after I lived there for like two months, I think, I went to GP by myself. She didn't take me to no GP, no nothing. All, everything I have to do it by myself and learn by myself. Josephine

Some of the children who took part in this research bemoaned the lack of contact they had with particular social workers, explaining that they had sometimes had irregular contact and long periods without seeing them.

She is very busy, sometimes...long time [maybe for three to four months] I don't see her... I don't ask the social worker I ask foster carers. Canh

So like I had a really terrible social worker. The previous one, she always come to the house like every three months, and she always call me on the phone and ask me what's going on if I am happy where I am. But that next one, when he call me, he says come and meet me to the pub, down the road where there is a bar, to talk. Adebayo

The new [social worker] is very friendly, the other one would not come when she said she would and I didn't see her very much. Iris

Anne described how the lack of regular contact with her social worker meant that she felt that she could not express her true feelings to her as they had not had the opportunity to build up the trust needed for her to open up:

My social worker, in terms of me, I needed more from her. My situation with other young people from this country was different...She wasn't calling me to check up on me, how are you, how are you doing?...One time we have a review meeting and everything and when she wrote her report, to say how is [young person] doing and everything, she was like oh [young person] is fine she is doing fine, she is going to college. And me, I wasn't. Because if she comes and we don't have that closeness, if she comes and asks how are you I be like oh I am fine. But if I come to someone else, then she will know even if I say I am fine, she will know what language I am using when I say I am fine but I am not fine. So because she doesn't really talk to me she will never know. Sometimes I feel like calling her but I can't because we haven't built up that relationship. Anne

The young people interviewed also said that they were not all receiving appropriate levels of support:

With social service no, they don't take anyone seriously. Especially me, I feel like it is only me. Even now they caused me a lot of problems: like care, housing, they put me in an area where they didn't explain anything. They are saying "why do you need to move?" I say because I don't feel safe. Christine

The lack of contact with social workers and key workers experienced by some had led them to turn to welfare solicitors or support workers from voluntary sector organisations:

How often do you see your key worker?

I don't see her for ages now. She booked an appointment to see me and she didn't turn up. She said something else has come up.

Is this the first time this happened?

No, they will say they are coming and then they never turn up and you will be waiting for them all day. Sometimes they won't even call you to say they are not coming and then if you call them they say "oh I am sorry darling, I am sorry".

Can you phone them if you need them?

If you phone them they will tell you that they will call you back and they won't call you back.

Do you think they understand you, are they helpful?

They are not. They are rubbish. The only time they try to be helpful is when they found out I have welfare solicitor. That is when they are running around, you have to go and do the dentist check, you have to go and do this. Christine

The survey of local authorities asked a series of questions about the barriers they have faced to supporting trafficked and/or potentially trafficked children.

The data should be treated with some caution as these were local authorities who had been supporting trafficked children in the past calendar year, and who, therefore, may have already resolved some issues that other authorities may be yet to experience. In addition the sample is small. However, analysis of responses to the survey from the local authorities who had recent experience of supporting trafficked children (as shown in Table 3 below) found that the main barriers (either 'major' or 'minor') to good service provision had been:

- Insufficient appropriate accommodation (10 out of 23 local authorities)
- Lack of understanding of trafficking among social workers (11)
- Pressures relating to the immigration system (11)
- Lack of understanding amongst staff of the immigration system (12).

These findings are in line with the negative experiences reported by the children interviewed. Thus identifying consistency in reported difficulties to providing the care required, and which is considered by children themselves to be most important to them.

It is interesting to note the number of local authority respondents who felt there were few (or no) barriers to supporting trafficked children in terms of accessing interpreters and independent advocacy, or in terms of the availability of experienced social workers to undertake age assessments.

Table 3: Barriers that have been faced by local authorities to supporting trafficked/potentially trafficked children (n=23)

	Major barrier	Minor barrier	No barrier	Don't know
Insufficient resources to support trafficked children	2	5	13	3
Insufficient appropriate accommodation	4	6	13	0
Issues around eligibility for services	0	4	19	0
Lack of understanding amongst social workers in trafficking	0	11	11	1
Lack of experienced social workers to undertake age assessments	0	4	18	1
Lack of access to interpreters	0	5	18	0
Lack of access to independent advocacy	0	3	16	4
Difficulties in providing an allocated permanent social worker for trafficked children	3	1	19	0
Turnover of social work staff	2	5	15	1
Too little contact time between social workers and trafficked children	3	4	16	0
Lack of understanding amongst staff of the immigration system	4	8	10	1
Pressures relating to the immigration system	5	6	9	3
Negative attitudes towards this group of children	0	2	20	1

4.4.4 Access immigration advice and to specialist services

Professionals who we interviewed said that a key problem for trafficked children was the variable quality of advice available on legal and immigration matters:

One of the big things we do is try and get very good immigration advice, but of course that is very hit and miss around the country and other practitioners won't have a clue that you need to get a very good immigration adviser to assist you with your case. There are other professionals who are not interested in getting immigration advice, and there are others who are but don't understand what it takes, who the experts are, what is necessary. Respondent from a voluntary organisation

*We did have a very good relationship with X Law Centre who I feel offered a very good service to our young people, and worked with them in a rather different way to the way most solicitors do. They did the legal job well, but they also recognised they were a young person and they needed support in different ways, and they needed to liaise and cooperate with us and inform us about things that are happening, which some solicitors don't do very well.*²⁴
Social Worker

There were some examples in our study of children not receiving good advice from their legal representatives on immigration issues. This was noted in cases where the voluntary sector

24 This was an issue identified in Brownlees and Smith (2011)

organisation supporting the young person had recognised the problem and supported individuals to find new legal representatives.

Most trafficked children approaching 18 years of age are likely to have an unresolved immigration issue or a short period of temporary leave and the impact of this can be particularly distressing. Anne talked about the court date for her upcoming appeal and how she felt she could not make plans in terms of education and work until she knew about her immigration status. And another young woman, Frances, expressed a fear of her traffickers both in the UK and if she was returned to Nigeria.

I worry that they send me back home that is my biggest worry...People at home have my picture maybe they can send it to the people here maybe they are looking and they see me and use knife or something. Or they can curse you, they themselves are not happy with us because they will be thinking that what you did was wrong. So they will do whatever they can to also make something bad happen to you, if Christ is not part of your life. I still cry when I think about this. Frances

Previous research with practitioners has reported that they advocate three specialist services to meet the specific needs of trafficked children (Pearce *et al.*, 2009):

- Trained and specialist interpreters
- Safe and supported accommodation with trained and supported foster carers
- A dedicated key worker.

The needs of trafficked children overlap largely with those of other separated children and these have been well documented (see for example, Kohli and Mather, 2003; Hek 2005; Chase *et al.*, 2008; Hopkins and Hill, 2010; Kohli, 2011; Newbigging and Thomas, 2011). However, delivering adequate specialist services seems to be hampered by the lack of available resources and the stakeholder respondents spoke of a wide variation of local authority provision across the country.

In the survey of local authorities, respondents were asked whether they had encountered any difficulties in accessing the following services for trafficked, and potentially trafficked, children.

As Table 4 below shows, some local authorities had faced 'some difficulties' in accessing cultural/religious opportunities, language support and family tracing services, and a small minority had faced 'some difficulties' in accessing citizenship awareness programmes, independent legal advice and repatriation services. As with the data from the survey reported in the previous section, these findings may not however, represent the national picture.

Table 4: Difficulties encountered by local authorities in accessing specialist services for trafficked children (local authorities who had supported trafficked children in the last year)

	Many difficulties	Some difficulties	None	Not yet been required	Don't know
Cultural/religious opportunities (n=22)	0	5	12	1	4
Citizenship and cultural awareness programmes (n=22)	0	2	9	4	7
Independent legal advice (n= 23)	0	2	17	2	2
Language support (n=22)	0	6	15	1	0
Family tracing and contact services (n=23)	1	6	5	5	6
Repatriation services (n=20)	1	3	5	6	5

There is the additional caveat for all findings on access to services that, as one professional pointed out, there is a key dependency upon a child being identified as trafficked and appropriate actions being taken:

Those who have been identified as trafficked then should – if the local authority works well – have access to counselling, trauma support, education, health and care support to address their needs, and also to legal support, because of course one of the jobs of the social worker is to make sure they get good legal advice in terms of any upcoming asylum or immigration claim, just basic things like referring the child through the National Referral Mechanism. The majority of social workers have never heard of it, so obviously wouldn't do it. Respondent from a voluntary organisation

4.4.5 Access to generic services

Access to education, safe accommodation, health services and opportunities to make friends and socialise are vitally important for trafficked children to remain safe, rebuild their lives and start to move on from their experiences. However, the professional stakeholders we spoke to in interviews and in the expert stakeholder seminar highlighted that 'access' could be an issue even when services were in place. This was primarily due to the additional support requirements of some trafficked children.

As the following quotes indicate, language, social and life skills, as well as a confidence building, might be a prerequisite for some children to make use of universal services.

In terms of integration a young person will need that, so if they want to visit a youth club or join a football club, they quite often are going to need someone to go with them that first time and support them in that process and it is the availability of people to do that with them, and the language barrier as well. They need the language skills to integrate with these groups and these services so if that organisation can't provide an interpreting service it is very difficult for these young people to participate. Respondent from a voluntary organisation

Often when they have been trafficked we forget they have often missed nearly the whole of their childhood, and haven't been given that socialisation process that other young people who have grown up in a natural environment would have done. Learning life skills, confidence building, managing money, all those things can be really useful. Respondent from a voluntary organisation

Within the survey, local authority respondents were asked to indicate whether they have faced any barriers in accessing generic services for these young people. As Table 5 illustrates, the majority reported that they had not faced many difficulties in accessing appropriate education, general health, sexual health and youth/leisure services. However, some local authorities had faced some difficulties in accessing mental health services, appropriate education, befriending and youth/leisure services, indicating that there are some issues to resolve in terms of providing these basic services to support this group of children.

Table 5: Difficulties encountered by local authorities in accessing generic services for trafficked children (local authorities who had supported trafficked children in the last year)

	Many difficulties	Some difficulties	None	Not yet been required	Don't know
Appropriate education n=23	0	6	15	1	1
General health services (GPs, Dentist) n=23	0	1	18	1	3
Access to sexual health services n=22	0	0	19	1	2
Access to mental health services/ counselling n=23	1	7	10	4	1
Voluntary/befriending services n=23	1	5	13	3	1
Youth/leisure opportunities n=23	0	4	16	1	2

4.4.6 Therapeutic support

Research evidence from previous studies indicates the likelihood that some trafficked children will need treatment for the severe maltreatment they will have suffered (ECPAT UK and Save the Children, 2007; Zimmerman *et al.*, 2006; Brownlees and Finch, 2010; Kohli and Mather, 2003).

The children in this research did not talk in much detail about therapeutic support they had received. Some reported that they had benefited from counselling and that they had accessed this through their social or key worker, solicitor or voluntary sector workers. Some had experienced serious mental health issues as a result of the exploitation they had been exposed to, and the uncertainty of what may happen to them after discovery. One young woman described her feelings shortly after being placed in foster care:

One day it is too much for my head. I would cry every day, I can't eat I can't do nothing. One day I said I don't even know when I said it but they have to put in diary. I said I feel like killing myself better than this kind of life. Then my foster mum had to ring everybody. They were scared for me, it was too much when I said I want to kill myself. Frances

Another interviewee expressed frustration that social services did not offer adequate help with her depression, or ask if she needed it:

Social services didn't do anything, and I was so depressed when I arrived. And I have had difficult times since then. [Voluntary sector organisation] has helped and has referred me to [a specialist therapeutic centre] for help. Sometimes things have been really bad but social services never ask and never look at you, they never know. And you don't feel like you can tell them. Josephine

As already described in the previous section, a number of local authorities indicated in their responses to the survey that they had had some difficulties providing access to mental health services. This gap in provision was also remarked upon during stakeholder interviewees:

Obviously you have got the CAMHS, you have got the mental health services all over, but having someone specifically for trafficking issues and for what a trafficked child has been, through those services are quite limited sometimes I feel. Respondent from a voluntary organisation

Often they have been through this really traumatic experience, they are not given much time to recover from that, often there is not much therapeutic support, like CAMHS assistance, they won't meet the threshold for that, and not really much support for the emotional abuse they have been through or the trauma they have been through. Respondent from a voluntary organisation

Previous studies have described the types of physical and mental health needs manifested by trafficked children stating that they are likely to be suffering from high levels of depression, hostility, stress, anxiety, and fear of authority, as well as in fear of their exploiters. Outward manifestations of depression, anxiety or hostility were identified as panic attacks, difficult or anti-social behaviour or suicidal thoughts. Physical signs such as pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, and drug addiction were also proposed as possible indicators that a child might have been trafficked (ECPAT UK and Save the Children, 2007).

A report written by Zimmerman et al (2006) identified the possible physical and psychological health consequences for trafficked women and adolescents:

- 63 per cent of women interviewed experienced stomach pain
- 82 per cent reported feeling easily tired
- 83 per cent reported feeling easily irritated
- 67 per cent experienced temper outbursts.

One aspect of mental health that can cause difficulties is an inability to remember parts of the traumatic events – and problems with recalling pertinent information can sometimes impact upon the credibility of the child in giving evidence or information to authorities where there are inconsistencies or gaps in their story (Herlihy *et al* 2012). Other studies on unaccompanied and separated migrant children also highlight the particular emotional vulnerability of this group (see for example; Brownlees and Finch, 2010; Kohli and Mather, 2003).

Counselling is seen as an important provision for many former trafficked children to access. However, some evidence suggests that trafficked children might prefer a period of settling into a new life before accessing therapy, and others may perceive counselling as just talking rather than providing practical help, so may not see the importance of it. It is also the case that some children may find Western 'talking therapies' culturally inappropriate (The Children's Society, 2009).

4.4.7 Access to education

The importance of education for the social and emotional well-being of young refugees has been widely reported (see for example, Chase *et al*, 2008) and, since 2006, local authorities have had

a statutory duty under the Education and Inspections Act to identify children in their area missing from education, with trafficked children identified within this legislation as being at 'most risk'.

Some of the children interviewed reported poor experiences around accessing education. One girl said that social workers told her she could not go to school because of her immigration status:

And [the social workers] didn't even want to help me with my education, cos I couldn't read or write and every time they kept telling me what do, you are an immigrant so you can't go to school. They say they will get you a private tutor but they never do. Every time, every review they talk about this thing and the immigration officer was saying but we need to prepare you for the worst when they send you back. Christine

For trafficked children who spend periods of their childhood not attending school, further delays in accessing education will compound the problem. Learning English and the social experience of school can reduce isolation in addition to the benefit of acquiring knowledge and skills. This was acknowledged by Josephine, who did not receive support from her local authority to access education.

Social services didn't help me with this, I started going to English classes with [a voluntary sector organisation] and they paid for my travel, it was a long way, but I needed to do English and I couldn't stay on my own alone everyday at my house. When I wanted to start college social services told me to look for a college in central London because they were going to move me there. I found a college and started there, then they didn't move me and they told me I had to find a local one but the local one was full then. I was so upset. [A voluntary sector organisation] got me a grant so that I could travel to my college, if not I would not have been able to go. Josephine

Only one of the children in this research had not attended school and/or college in the UK. Susan tried to register for a college place but was told that she would have to wait for several months before there would be a place available for her.

Many stakeholder respondents identified education as being of critical importance to these children.

I think the big one is education. If you were to provide a child with education and provide them with the hope that their life will get better, that will support children, because they get stuck in limbo, they hang around, they go to endless meetings, different social workers, different immigration solicitors, police, criminal solicitors, they go to all these different places and a lot of the time they sit at home, and that is one reason why we started the youth group. Respondent from a voluntary organisation

However, professionals also corroborated children's reported experiences of the inadequacy of advice given:

I think there are two main issues, one is they are often given the wrong advice, so for example, this young person in question has refugee status, she is perfectly entitled to go to further or higher education but someone in social services told her she wouldn't be because she has refugee status, which is wrong advice, very wrong advice. [Respondent from a voluntary organisation]

In other research it has been suggested that:

- Many trafficked children are not registered for school (Pearce et al. ,2009)
- Learning English is especially important for trafficked children – and that it is best to provide these classes within school as the more time spent outside of school might increase their vulnerability to further exploitation (Pearce et al., 2009)
- Access to education can improve the potential to safeguard a trafficked child (The Children’s Society, 2009)
- (similarly to trafficked children) Refugees and asylum seeking children often face delays in accessing education (Doyle and McCorrison, 2008; Walker, 2011).

As already indicated in Table 5, six out of 23 local authorities indicated difficulties in accessing appropriate education for trafficked children. Other reports have also highlighted that many trafficked children and young people were not registered at school (see for example, Pearce *et al*, 2009).

4.4.8 Accommodation

The issues concerning the importance of safe, secure accommodation for trafficked children when first discovered have been discussed earlier in the report. However, problems with accommodation continue to persist throughout the care process and pervade into transition towards independence.

Since discovery, the children interviewed had been accommodated in:

- Foster homes (including one private fostering arrangement)
- Initial accommodation for adult asylum seekers
- Semi-independent accommodation
- Hostels
- Private rented accommodation
- Shared and individual accommodation
- Social housing.

Overall the predominant features of their experiences around accommodation were multiple moves and ongoing instability, and most had either the prospect and/or experience of further moves taking place from the age of 18.

I like it [with my foster carer] but I am never sure because I am always moving new, not there for long. Precious

Christine had had a particularly bad experience in one of her foster placements. Despite having told her social worker that she was afraid of dogs (there were dogs in one of her early placements), she was then moved to a new foster home that also had dogs present. Unfortunately this did not prove to be the worst outcome of the move, because when her new

foster carer learnt of her previous domestic servitude she began to treat her like a domestic servant:

She turn me to like a little slave. Later she know my story and she start wanting me to be doing things for her and then saying she is going to adopt me and then saying everything she said I have to do. I was thinking what does she want me to do? Like cleaning this and that she telling me to be using my hands to be taking the weed out of the garden, hoovering the floor she doesn't want dog hair on the floor. I cleaning, weed everything that you have to be on your knees. Christine

In addition to those types of household chores, she also was required to take care of the foster carer's father. This experience was the main reason that Christine was highly critical of her social workers during her interview:

I wouldn't say [social workers] are good, they are terrible. They kind of leave me in a vulnerable position, because I get more abuse by the way they were treating me, because I was left alone when the foster mum knew that no one is taking care of me, no one is asking for me they can kind of do what they want. Christine

One young person was accommodated on her own shortly after discovery and the isolation she felt there and the lack of support from others was a terrifying experience that made her recall the trauma of her trafficking experiences:

The place where they sent me was really far away and I didn't have no support, like no-one with me and I was like 17 years old and I just came out from an experience that was a big impact on my life and living by myself I didn't feel safe. I remember the person who took me to the place, I used to beg him to don't leave me there, even though I didn't know him, I only knew him for a couple of hours, like six hours, but I told him to don't leave me there because the house was far, and no-one was there, and it just bring back memories of my past. Josephine

In the circumstances described by these young people, it is a serious concern that social services did not listen to what they said and perhaps seek an alternative placement or put additional support in place.

Turning 18 will often trigger changes in the way that young people in the local authority care system are accommodated.²⁵ Three young people in this sample described moving into 'temporary' accommodation, but sometimes they remained there for a long time so they were left uncertain about what their future living arrangements would be.

I like where I am living now, but they say I will have to move again. They say this all the time but I don't move. When I arrived I was living on my own, it was in a house with three rooms but no-one else lived there at the beginning, I think because it was too far. I was very scared there and it was so far from social services and to get help from anyone. I didn't feel safe there. I feel safe now but I don't know when I am going to move...They tell me I have to move, but other people in my accommodation are there for a shorter time than me and they get moved, but I am still here. They left me on my own at the beginning when I really needed

²⁵ Broader issues relating to transition at 18 will be discussed in later sections.

help, then a long time later they say they can't move me because they have to see if I can look after myself. It's too late now. Josephine

Mariam, who was 18 years old at the time of her interview, was living in a flat with her baby. She had been told by the local authority that this was a temporary arrangement and she would have to move, possibly to a different local authority area. She found this a worrying prospect as her support network including friends, church, college and childcare was in her local community.

Charlotte had concerns about the area in which she was housed because of fears about her trafficker:

The area I am not happy.

Why are you not happy with the area?

Because that is where my boss lives.

This is where the woman who trafficked you lives and you didn't want to live in that area?

Does it worry you?

Yeah

Did you tell them that you would rather not live in this area. Did you tell housing?

I didn't tell housing, I told my social worker.

And what did they say?

They are saying that there is very few refugees places, you might not get another place.

Another interviewee, Gloria, talked about feeling unsafe in her accommodation due to fear of her male housemates and their friends. She had been placed in shared accommodation and the two men she lived with had friends visiting regularly. She indicated that her previous experiences of sexual exploitation meant she could not feel secure in this setting.

A number of stakeholders raised concerns about this issue, including the risk posed to young people by placement in inappropriate housing and how the lack of housing options could have detrimental effects on children's opportunities to access education, leisure or cultural activities – especially if they come to be placed some distance away from any safe links they have forged.

I think you risk increasing your child's vulnerability if they are placed in inappropriate accommodation. Respondent from a voluntary organisation

For example, a young woman I am working with now is about to be moved to accommodation, she has been told it is the only accommodation that is going to be offered to her, at the moment she walks to college, she cannot afford to travel to her college, and her accommodation is going to be too far from her college, so she has a choice of giving up college to get accommodation. Choices like that are not going to help her settle and integrate, and she has to go to college or obtain housing. It is crazy. Respondent from a voluntary organisation

A lot of young people we place them in flats, it sounds horrendous, and it probably is really. We try and get other people who come from the same country to pop round and support them. We try to give them as much support as possible. I think it is really hard to give people the amount of support you want, given the assistance we have, we are not allowed to put them in residential care in case they might be over 18. Social Work Manager

Overall, the data indicates that the problem of unsuitable accommodation, and the vulnerability of trafficked children and young people in these situations, features throughout the care process from discovery through to transition.

4.4.9 Moving on from being trafficked

Research conducted by The Children's Society (2009) found that young people who had made the most progress with moving on from their experiences were those who had regularised their immigration status and were no longer waiting for a response from the Home Office. For some, having this status had given them the confidence to disclose that they had been abused. In contrast, those who failed to get status were said to often have spent years in uncertainty, making it hard to plan for the future in terms of education or work thereby placing them in a more vulnerable position.

In the same study, aside from immigration issues, young people reported that what had most helped them was accessing education, having a good foster placement, having good supportive friends, having good support workers, and access to drop-in centres for young people.

Drawing on an extensive study within the UK on services provided to unaccompanied children, Wade *et al.* (2005) identified that these children settle if they have:

- A safe and supportive place to live
- Continuities with past relationships, customs and cultures and opportunities to create new ones
- Access to purposeful education and training
- Opportunities to move forward from troubling experiences, re-centre their lives, and find new purpose in everyday routines and activities.

Brownlee and Finch (2011) argued in their study that support that is practical as well as nurturing and which connects young people into society is one of the key aspects for promoting their resilience.

Key findings in regard to supporting trafficked children

- Only a minority of the sample of trafficked children were happy with the care and support provided by their social workers. Although some individual social workers were seen as supportive, practice varied widely
- Trafficked children often had multiple social workers or key workers and so lacked continuity of care, and had to frequently repeat their story
- Trafficked children's criticism of social care support centred around a lack of contact and support, not being listened to and social workers not doing things that they should do. This was reported to lead to a lack of trust.
- Trafficked children reported turning to welfare solicitors and/or support workers from voluntary organisations to get the services and support they needed

- Stakeholder respondents repeatedly highlighted the need to see what has happened to the child as a child protection issue and respond accordingly
- Concerns were raised that social work teams specialising in one area (e.g. asylum or looked after children) might not have the full range of knowledge or skills required to manage the often complex situations
- Concerns were raised that child protection support could be compromised by some trafficked children's uncertain immigration status especially during transition from children's services to adult services/independence
- Many trafficked children undergo (multiple) age assessments, which some practitioners thought were highly problematic for this group of children
- Age assessments were often taking place in police stations and in some cases it was reported that they were being undertaken by social workers who were making pre-judgements
- Children reported that following age assessments and the questioning of them (and often disbelief about their age) they found it difficult to have good relationships with their social worker
- Some children within the sample interviewed had their age wrongly identified and had been sent to adult prisons, detention centres or been placed in adult accommodation, placing them in a very vulnerable position
- Access to good quality immigration advice was highlighted by stakeholders to be a concern
- Local authorities reported barriers to supporting trafficked children including insufficient accommodation, a lack of understanding amongst social workers of the immigration system and pressures relating to the immigration process
- There were reported barriers to providing an allocated permanent social worker to trafficked children
- Local authorities reported that they had faced some difficulties in accessing appropriate education, mental health services and leisure opportunities for trafficked children
- Education for trafficked children was seen as vitally important, although provision was varied. Some trafficked children received incorrect advice about their education, and/or did not receive their right to an education
- A lack of appropriate accommodation was highlighted as posing potential risks to trafficked children as well as having detrimental effect on children's access to leisure, education and/or cultural opportunities
- Trafficked children reported multiple accommodation moves and sometimes living in inappropriate placements where they reported living in fear.

4.5 Transition to adulthood and independence

Trafficked children can encounter additional challenges from the age of 16 when they enter a period of 'transition' into adulthood. Key changes can be:

- The need to move to independence with changes in accommodation and a reduction in the amount of support received from social workers
- Changes in financial support, as young people move from local authority support on to work or mainstream benefits (if they are entitled)
- Cessation of monitoring visits for those children who are privately fostered
- Reduced support for education.

Harris and Robinson found that 14 to 18 years olds did not receive adequate support when they were vulnerable to sexual exploitation. The same study also found that young people over 16 years were unlikely to receive a child protection response when being sexually exploited (2007).²⁶ As previously mentioned, as many as half of the young people trafficked into the UK are aged 16 or 17 years old (CEOP, 2009). Child benefit also ends at 16 for young people not in full time education, and Children's Society research identified a number of cases of trafficked young people being made homeless when their exploiters could no longer claim child benefit for them (2009).

For many trafficked children, depending on their immigration status, transition may be compounded by disruption around whether they can legally stay in the country. All these things contribute to increased vulnerability and, given the (estimated) predominance of 16 and 17 year olds among those trafficked into the UK, this suggests that a large number of trafficked children will experience huge difficulties during this period of their lives.

The young people we interviewed recalled their trepidation about the transition to independence. For those who were interviewed after they had turned 18, some reported having been forewarned about what to expect by social workers, key workers, legal representatives or staff from voluntary sector organisations, but others said that they had not been made aware of what would happen and could not recall taking part in planning the transition.

Actually they didn't [explain what was going to happen at 18]. The only thing I understand is that you are going to be 18 and we are just going to drop everything, even they don't want me to go to college anymore. They telling me if I can find some job maybe in a chicken and chips shop, I'd be lucky to find one in McDonalds. I said but I can't work, I can't speak properly and I can't write. They say you just need to find something that you can do. Christine

26 In its inquiry into the child protection system last year, the Education Select Committee raised concerns about the failings of the system to care for older children. It stated that older children are let down too often, frequently ignored or not listened to and can be pushed out of care too young and insufficiently prepared and supported. They were also particularly concerned over the situation of trafficked and asylum-seeking children stating that in all cases children must be treated as children first, and not just as either criminals or immigration cases.
<http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/education-committee/news/substantive-children-first>

Some young people had not been involved in appropriate planning with those looking after them. In the following example the process of creating a 'Pathway Plan' had only started after the young person's welfare solicitor became involved (and it seems apparent that she remained unclear about its purpose or usefulness):²⁷

Did anybody talk to you when you turned 18?

Before I didn't know about a Pathway Plan.

They didn't tell you about the Pathway Plan?

Yeah they only say I don't know what it mean before I know what it means.

Do you know now, did they tell you?

They just ask me to sign something

They wanted you to sign things that you didn't understand?

Every six months they would have meeting with me. They call it pathway plan, I don't know what it means then sometimes they would read something for me and they say you been going to college. Jane

Of those young people who were more aware of what would happen, some were worried about the level of ongoing support they would receive. Frances, who was 17 years old when she was interviewed, explained:

I am worried about so many things like booking of appointments, like work when I turn 18 I don't think anybody is going to be helping me like this, like booking appointments. Frances

Changing levels of financial support and increased responsibility and independence were also a concern for some. One young woman stated that her key worker had not explained clearly about council tax, and that she had subsequently received a court summons for non-payment as she was not aware of her obligations. Others spoke of the difficulties they had in managing on a restricted budget:

Like I have got so many things to do now, to take care of myself and it comes back to when I was in college I used to have free bus pass, but now since I finished college it is difficult. If you go somewhere I really need to have something for me to use bus. The money that I am getting is just not enough. Because you get the money when you are under 18 like £60 or something, but when you turn 18 they reduce the money. I don't see the point because that's when you need it. So now I find it so difficult when I have to go somewhere. Like today, I get my money on Friday by Monday I don't have anything. Sometimes I try and have £10 left, I have to go somewhere, or I have to buy something like food or anything it is just difficult. It is really, really hard. And I can't work. Anne

At the moment I am worried about my home issues, I need support for those things. I am working but I just started job, I don't have money to be buying furniture. Charlotte

Many stakeholders expressed frustration during their interviews with the transition process, describing how trafficked young people aged 16–18 faced multiple challenges. Examples included:

²⁷ Every young person who leaves the care of a local authority – usually at the age of 18 – should be involved in developing and agreeing a Pathway Plan with their social worker in preparation for moving on. This document should ensure that they “are given the same level of care and support their peers would expect from a reasonable parent and that they are provided with the opportunities and chances needed to help them move successfully to adulthood” (DfE, 2010)

There are far too many children who don't get a service at all, because the central issue is that their transition to adulthood is entirely caught up in the immigration process, and the immigration process for children turning 18 is a mess, and therefore they are caught in this mess, and they can end up being here with no recourse to public funds, no housing, and if they weren't being criminally exploited up to that point, they are then spectacularly vulnerable to being criminally exploited because what else are they going to do? Where are they going to get money, shelter, support? Respondent from a voluntary organisation

When young people come to the attention of the authorities, those that have been trafficked or just separated for other reasons, at that point, you should be straight into a family proceedings really, which if it was joined up with an immigration court would allow best interests decision to be made for that young person within six months of them becoming known. That decision would then be lasting, i.e. if it was found that the family of that child wanted them back, or was safe and well, then the young person should probably be returned to their country of origin – would be in their best interests – but if it finds the opposite, then the young person not only stays, but is granted indefinite leave to remain in the UK, and become a UK citizen, at which point they are eligible for after care services, eligible for the semi-independent stuff, and they are also, of course, eligible for higher education... We have said you can't stay but we are not deporting you. You haven't any housing, you haven't got any support, you can't go to university, but you can live on the streets, over to you – it is just an appalling situation. Respondent from a voluntary organisation

A few respondents felt that the Home Office should identify looked after trafficked children as a priority for decision making as they reach the transition stage.

One interviewee, a solicitor, described how young people may receive little or no preparation for significant changes:

I have come across a lot of examples in [a local authority area] of young people when they have turned 18 they have been in a placement for a couple of years, and have been moved on a matter of two or three hours' notice to accommodation they have never seen.

Local authority survey respondents were asked whether all trafficked children within their care have a written care Pathway Plan by the time they reached 16 years old. Out of the 23 who had been supporting trafficked children in the last calendar year, 17 said that they did, two stated no and four did not know. When asked a subsequent question as to whether these written Pathway Plans included 'triple planning' (i.e. planning for remaining in the UK, planning for a return to their home country or continued uncertainty), 13 local authorities stated that they did include this, three said no and seven did not know. However, undertaking a process does not also ensure quality, and as described a number of stakeholders raised concerns about this process:

In terms of Pathway Planning, often this is not done particularly well leading up to it... I have been to many of the meetings and it is not particularly useful, and the young people are often not given full support like education, independent learning, independent living skills, or help to find accommodation, and often they are left to do that themselves with help from NGOs or other services, which isn't really right. Respondent from a voluntary organisation

A social work manager stressed the importance of providing emotional support as well as practical guidance during this period of uncertainty:

Again we would treat them as a care leaver first and foremost. If they are a looked after child that is what we would focus on, obviously being aware the immigration process is running in parallel, and we are very much aware of the stresses and challenges the young people are facing around that. I am also very clear with staff how we need to be advising young people when we start working with them about what the process is and what the potential outcomes are. I don't think it would be fair for them to be led almost into a false sense of security they have made their applications and probably everything will be okay, whereas what we know is that an awful lot of young people are left in limbo for a number of years, and it is about how do you manage supporting them. We can sort out the financial stuff – we are clear about that – but it is about the emotional support that somebody needs when they don't know what is going to happen to them from day to day.

Other stakeholders highlighted the heightened risk that trafficked children were at during this period:

Obviously the support drops off drastically and that is when they can be very vulnerable and at risk of being re-trafficked, when they find their support mechanism is not there as much as it used to be or at all, and if they then get picked up in their local community or by their trafficker again, then they are obviously very vulnerable. Respondent from a voluntary organisation

It was noted at the expert stakeholder seminar that young people who have emerged from trafficking situations will often have problems understanding their new environments, especially if they are placed straight into independent living arrangements. Whilst this may be true to some extent for other care leavers, it could be argued that this group is particularly likely to need additional support and to benefit from extended stays in foster care (i.e. beyond 18 years of age). The effects of their trafficking on their mental health may result in a need for greater support.

Those attending the expert stakeholder seminar argued that some trafficked children will have had little experience of a family environment that most care leavers would take for granted. For example, one professional reported that a young person who had escaped an exploitative situation was afraid to use too much water from the taps as she thought there was a cost every time she turned them on. It is important when giving support to take nothing for granted and possibly provide intensive or ongoing support. Additional support in budgeting and life skills would help this group of young people to adjust to independence.

Key findings concerning the transition to adulthood/adult services for trafficked children

- Transition was identified by all participants in this review to be problematic
- Transition for trafficked children is especially problematic as it is often linked to the immigration decision making process
- Many stakeholders raised concerns about the increased vulnerability of these young people, and the severe drop in support and services following transition
- Although most local authorities reported undertaking Pathway Planning with trafficked children, the quality of this was questioned and in some cases reported to be very poor

- Trafficked young people reported not understanding the Pathway Planning process, being left unsupported and without the life skills to cope with their situation
- Trafficked children may require particular additional support around skills for independent living
- Some respondents felt that the Home Office should prioritise the immigration decision making process for this group of young people.

4.6 The child's understanding of the care process

I didn't understand what the social workers were saying because they talked too fast with too many new words. I was tired of all the appointments, talking and repeating words. I lost hope. Sorry but the thing is they do say it, a lot of paperwork they give you, you can't read it. Frances

The process trafficked children go through can be very confusing for them. As noted previously, before discovery some of these young people did not have any idea of where they were and most had no understanding of what support might be available, so multiple contacts with adults from different agencies may be particularly distressing. The state of children's mental health after a period of exploitation may also affect their ability to comprehend what is happening, sometimes compounded by not being able to understand the English language.

Attendees at the expert stakeholder seminar noted that there will be some young people who remain confused even when things have been explained multiple times. Despite this, it was agreed that good practice is to continually answer questions, provide explanations and reinforce messages in order that every effort is made to maximise the chance of children being clear about what is happening to them and why. Without this understanding, and the development of trust with the child by professionals and carers, the risk may remain that they will return to the 'known' environment provided by their traffickers.

Some stakeholder interviewees echoed these views, for example:

I will take quite a long time to sit with them with an interpreter and talk to them about what their understanding is, what they think is happening, and then advise them on what is going to happen next and update them all along the process, which I think is important. You might think you are shielding them, but I think you need to speak to them every step of the way, because that is what the trafficker didn't do. They have been locked up, they have been excluded, they haven't had any rights, got any knowledge about anything, and I think it is very important in terms of the trust process to update them every step of the way.

Respondent from a voluntary organisation

Only one of the children interviewed did not express confusion about some aspect of the process they lived through since escaping their traffickers. Children interviewed in the review described being confused about:

- What a 'foster carer' was
- What a 'social worker' was

- The difference between the roles of their solicitors (criminal, welfare and/or immigration)
- Why they were being taken to prison/Immigration Removal Centre
- The offence they were pleading guilty to
- The role of different people in their lives.

The children interviewed indicated that they struggled with the number and type of questions they had been asked, sometimes including technical or other unfamiliar words, and the range of people they had to engage with:

I didn't really [understand], I just...I was so confused...immigration sent me to social services I really didn't know what was their work, how are they going to support me and that. Josephine

[The police] didn't explain anything to me. I didn't even know what they are going to do to me in my life. I didn't even know what I was feeling. I was so scared of what is going to happen to me. Mariam

At the beginning when I was in care I didn't really understand, you know. There was always police appointments all the time and meetings with social services and solicitors. It was kind of stressful and I had a lot of things in my head. So actually I had no idea. All I knew is that I was just going to be sent back home really.. I can tell now who they were and what they were all about but at the time I didn't really. In the foster home I didn't really understand the foster home...I didn't know what foster parents were until six months later...I didn't know how it worked. And all the time I am having meetings with social services. I don't really understand what it means. Diana

I was 16 so they are asking me like do you need a lawyer or something and I'm like I don't know! I don't know what a solicitor is, I don't even know the meaning, so I don't know how to answer. Anne

The quotes above illustrate the confusion of some of the young people, especially in relation to who was doing what for them. When professionals had taken the time to appropriately explain what their roles were, this had been helpful and reassuring:

I understood them better because like 'I'm the solicitor, I deal with your health, make sure you are being taken care of properly to make sure you are being looked after properly' and the immigration one say that to live in this country you have to have this stuff that I don't know that you need. I think if I have all of those things maybe I could understand my foster mum more, so they explain to me a bit better. Christine

4.6.1 Access to interpreters

Within this study the 23 local authority survey respondents who had supported trafficked children within the last year were asked whether their authority has access to appropriately trained and CRB/DBS checked independent interpreters. Twenty stated that they always have access, while the remaining three said 'yes, sometimes'.

One local authority wrote that they have 'a clear system in place to ensure that interpreters can be accessed when required, along with translation of documents'. However, other respondents highlighted issues with this service including that the quality of interpreters varied considerably, and that there were 'challenges as the languages that have been needed has changed and has made it more difficult to ensure the standard of interpreter and that interpreters are not known to any victims'. Other research has also identified that the process of identifying trafficked children can be hampered if the interpreter does not have the necessary skills and training (Pearce *et al.*, 2009).

Pearce *et al* argued that practitioners should not assume that it is wise to use an interpreter from the same community as the child, because this proximity to the child's experiences can arouse fear by invoking associations with the very community that originally exploited the child. Rather, the emphasis should be on selecting interpreters based on training, skills and experience in preference to cultural similarity (2009).

4.6.2 Involvement in the review process

In the survey, all local authorities that had supported trafficked children in the last calendar year were asked whether trafficked children are routinely invited to their own reviews. All, except one (who did not know) answered that trafficked children were invited to attend. A subsequent question asked how the local authority ensured that the views of trafficked children were taken into consideration when making decisions about their care. All respondents stated that they complied with LAC (looked after children) guidance on reviews and some also stated that they provided interpreters or access to advocacy where appropriate.

However, reports from the stakeholder interviews and from children themselves indicated that merely inviting children to reviews can be ineffectual for offering adequate participation. The following were typical examples from those shared:

I went to a review recently. To be fair to them the social worker was off sick so they had a replacement come in, but there had been no interpreter booked whatsoever. The review was pretty useless in terms of the young person's point of view. They couldn't understand what was being said, they couldn't understand what was being asked of them, they couldn't input into the meeting at all, and I thought that was pretty awful. Respondent from a voluntary organisation

The number of times I have sat through interviews where they have had lengthy explanations which they have clearly not understood a word of, this is your 'LAC review' and this is your 'IRO', so it is meaningless, so 'Yes', keep the systems that are designed to protect these children, but remember this child in the middle of it does not understand most of it.
Respondent from a voluntary organisation

Respondents also felt that some independent reviewing officers (IROs) lacked knowledge, experience and training in issues relating to trafficked children. In addition, none of the children interviewed identified IROs as a source of support or as a key person in their lives.

Despite local authorities indicating that in the main they complied with LAC guidance, both practitioners and young people themselves repeatedly raised concerns that trafficked children did not understand what was happening to them, and were not provided with the necessary

information and support to help them through the care process and to express their views within the process.

Although the majority of local authority survey respondents stated that they provided accessible information to trafficked children, through the use of interpreters and/or translated materials, this did not always correspond to the particular needs of different trafficked children. As a result stakeholder interviewees and expert seminar attendees identified the necessity of one dedicated person to support trafficked children through this difficult period.

4.6.3 Guardians

A study by the psychotherapists Blackwell and Melzak (2000) identified that refugee children's distressing experiences can be mitigated by a sense of having at least one reliable adult companion in their lives, having opportunities to think about what had happened to them and giving meaning to it, a sense of their own "agency" so that they know that they can make choices to counter-balance their helplessness. Previous research has indicated that practitioners regard the building of a trusting relationship with the child they are working with as a prerequisite for effective practice. This is seen as vital to enabling the child to feel safe and to begin to share their experiences (Rigby, 2011). However, substantial gaps in these systems of support have been found and it has been reported that trafficked children are not able to turn to any one responsible adult (see for example, ECPAT UK, 2011a).

With reference to trafficked children in particular, a consistent recommendation within reports is that they should be given additional support through the appointment of a guardian who has the statutory duty to support the child in their legal, practical and emotional needs and who can advocate on their behalf. For example, ECPAT UK (2011) reports that children frequently have to instruct their own legal advisers. As they describe, there are considerable implications of this. For example, if a trafficked child is unwilling to instruct their solicitor because maybe they are in fear of what their trafficker might do, a guardian would have legal responsibility for the child and could instruct the solicitor to act in the child's best interests (2011). However, some reports also caution against using the existence of the legal guardian as a rationale for abdicating responsibilities for the case by other professionals (Pearce *et al*, 2009).

In line with this, a common theme raised by participants throughout this review has also been a recognised need for trafficked children to have a trusted adult who was independent from statutory service delivery, to help them to navigate through all the processes they are involved in, but also to ensure that their needs are being addressed by those with a legal responsibility to do so. In this research it has also been suggested that the key adult would 'hold' information, collected through careful questioning and assessment, which could be used by those agencies rather than each professional conducting the same information gathering exercise. Participants described this in different ways, including 'advocate', 'guardian' and 'independent trusted adult', although the exact nature and status of these roles are very different and thus not inter-changeable. As the social workers who took part in this review reported, although they try their best, they do not have the time to spend with each child to support them to attend numerous solicitor appointments, Home Office meetings, sort out practical difficulties such as bills, completing forms or indeed just spend time being with the child to provide emotional support. Attendees at the expert stakeholder seminar agreed with this point and explained that for them staff from voluntary sector organisations can perform this role, and provide continuity for the child in the way that social workers cannot. The complexity of the issues facing these young people can be illustrated in the following quotes:

Most of the young people we are talking about have no concept about this meeting-driven paper-driven care system, and youth offending system and/or police system that they get involved in. Suddenly lots of adults from different agencies become involved in their lives, nothing seems straightforward, often the young people we have worked with will have met three, four, five, six, seven adults in the first couple of weeks, who all say they are going to do something, and the child has no idea who they are, who they work for and what a lot of the terminology means. Respondent from a voluntary organisation

It is an alien environment for a lot of young people. It is very difficult for them to understand. Given that a lot of the professionals don't understand what the other professionals are doing, to expect a child to understand that is not realistic...to have that one trusted adult who the child will know they can ask anything about this, who will explain anything about this, get involved in lots of these meetings, and fill out the forms the child has to do is invaluable. Respondent from a voluntary organisation

A guardianship model has been piloted and evaluated by the Scottish Refugee Council and Aberlour children's charity, where all newly arrived separated children are allocated a guardian, who is their consistent point of contact. Findings from this evaluation suggest that the guardian is seen as someone who is there for the child, accompanies them and explains what is happening in the processes that have to be navigated by these children and helps them to understand what is going on. Eighty per cent of stakeholders who contributed to this evaluation stated that the pilot guardianship model had made children's lives better, a view shared strongly by the young people themselves. The evaluation concluded that guardians improved the outcomes for children across three domains: asylum issues, well-being and social networks, thus enabling the young people to rebuild their lives. The guardian role was also identified as facilitating increased communication and information sharing between professionals (Crawley and Kohli, 2013).

A number of the voluntary sector respondents highlighted a guardianship model as a way forward in meeting these identified needs of trafficked children.

We are actually calling for a system of guardianship, as soon as a child is identified, they get this one person who acts as a guardian who acts in their best interest, because at the moment they don't have that. They may get referred to social services, depending on what teams – they can be pushed about different teams – and then they may get age disputed, and there may be other social workers, and it can be quite a scary time. Also they haven't got parents. Respondent from a voluntary organisation

Research into the provision of social work support to unaccompanied and separated children, including those who may have been trafficked, indicated that often children had very little contact with their social workers:

In reality, very few unaccompanied or separated migrant children or young people received intensive personalised support from their social workers. In many cases, especially those in semi-independent or supported accommodation, contact only took place when they called social workers to make an appointment with them. They were aware that they were one of many cases and did not always see their social workers as often as they would have liked. (Brownlees and Finch, 2010, p124)

In this review, there were many examples of children who had people in their lives who were performing this type of role, and thus who had benefited from vital support and advocacy. Young people often identified the support workers from voluntary sector organisations as the people who had helped them most, and these adults were performing an informal guardianship role.

***So who has helped you the most, it could be many people? In practical terms, in anything?** I know this will sound funny but it is [voluntary sector project worker]. When [she] came to my foster home and I tell [her] what happened in my foster home and [she] take me out the same day I was really really happy because I was scared of that woman, because I didn't want to upset her because she was very good to me. Christine*

[Staff at a voluntary sector organisation] have helped me the most, they helped with my immigration status, I was afraid to go back to my country, they found me a solicitor and took me to lots of appointments. They brought me to their young woman's group. They helped me with English classes. They helped me with food. I used to get some food at their office and that really helped me to cope. They kept calling social services and helped me to get a social worker, they kept telling them that I was so unhappy in my accommodation and needed to move. They kept listening to me. They wanted to help me, they thought about me, they didn't just say wait and go away. They referred me to other people for help too. ... Knowing that someone thought about me and would help me. When I came to the UK I didn't know what to expect, I didn't know what I was allowed to ask for. Some other children told me that I had to be rude to social services to get what I needed, but I didn't want to do that. Now I think that maybe you have to. If it wasn't for the [staff at a voluntary sector organisation] I don't know what I would have done. Josephine

The quotes above give examples of trafficked children benefitting from the support provided by a person independent of statutory service provision. This status enabled them to challenge inadequate care arrangements provided by local authorities, and, given that the research has shown that children had frequently not received appropriate care, the need for an independent guardian was clear. Responses from professional stakeholders also underlined the need for trafficked children to have a trusted adult who was independent from statutory service delivery, to help them to navigate through all the processes they are involved in, but also to ensure that their needs are being addressed by those with a legal responsibility to do so.

Key findings with regard to children's understanding of the care process

- Across all respondents it was identified that trafficked children find the care process confusing
- Stakeholders reported that if a child did not understand what was happening to them and did not have trust in an adult then there was a risk that they may return to their traffickers
- Although most local authorities provided interpreters there were concerns about the quality of the service provided
- Although all local authorities stated that trafficked children were invited to their LAC reviews, there were repeated concerns from stakeholders that the children did not understand what was going on. Trafficked children confirmed this

- A consistent theme throughout the research was a need for trafficked children to have a trusted adult, independent from statutory service delivery to support young people to navigate the care process (and legal processes) and to challenge possible care arrangements which were not meeting their entitlements. A guardianship model was identified as a way to address this challenge.

4.7 Training and awareness of trafficked children

Basic awareness of the trafficking of children has been growing in the UK in recent years, partly due to increased media coverage. However, stakeholder interviewees and survey respondents within this review highlighted the need for better understanding of the issues around trafficking by the general public. They also identified a need for greater awareness and more training for staff in agencies and professions who may come into contact with trafficked children, so that they can identify possible indicators and refer using clear pathways:

At least everybody having some basic knowledge so even if they don't know what to do they are at least aware "this does not feel quite right, I have some concerns about this, what am I going to do about it", so they at least know who to go and talk to so they can get that advice so we can pick it up in the proper way. Respondent from voluntary sector organisation

I don't think I would be saying anything new in saying that obviously training and awareness raising of professionals who may come into contact with children is vital in ensuring they get picked up at the earliest possible point, and this ranges from a whole range of professionals from police officers, social workers, immigration officials, people who are working in youth offending, the criminal justice system, CPS, magistrates, health systems and education systems, so a whole range of professionals who might come across a trafficked child, and the more they are aware of the issue, the more likely the children are to be identified. But allied to that you need to have a very clear pathway for people to know what to do if they suspect someone may have been trafficked. Respondent from a voluntary organisation

Some interviewees argued that specific training was needed for professionals who were involved in safeguarding:

It is not on the social work curriculum; it is not on the police training curriculum; it is nowhere in either the health or educational professionals child protection modules with their training. It is interesting we have a safeguarding population, safeguarding workforce out there, who have not really got the first idea what they are looking for, or what to do when they find it, and that is not their fault'. Respondent from a voluntary organisation

A number of interviewees also highlighted a gap in knowledge within the criminal justice system. Particular concerns were expressed about duty criminal solicitors who were seen to be routinely advising children to plead guilty to crimes which could be associated with trafficking. An issue which has already been identified as affecting a number of children in this scoping review sample.

Two social work managers we interviewed said that they felt social workers were sometimes not confident in their skills, often because of the small number of trafficking cases they dealt with. A small number of local authorities, even those with few cases, had identified this gap and were trying to make some redress by prioritising training through strategic groups of, for example, their missing, exploited and trafficked children sub-groups. However, a frontline practitioner from a voluntary organisation also stated that some managers did not adequately understand the issues:

I think it needs to be at a higher level as well now, managers who are making the decisions, because quite often we are finding social workers are on board and they are happy to accept the young person's age, for instance, but it is the manager who thinks, 'I am not sure, I think I need another one, another assessment needs to be done'. So they are not just not believing the young person, they are also not believing their own team.

In response to the survey of local authorities, 27 respondents provided information on whether their social care practitioners had received training in identifying the indicators of trafficking. 21 said they had provided this training, five had not and did not plan to do so, and one respondent did not know whether training had been provided. As one survey respondent wrote '*given the low numbers it is not seen as a priority*'. Others, however, had a different approach stating that '*all multi-agencies within the borough have access to face-to-face training on child trafficking which is delivered four times a year*'.

Other research suggests that although there may be good awareness of child trafficking in some unaccompanied children's teams or asylum teams in some local authorities (where there are possibly higher numbers of cases), this is not the case everywhere (Pearce *et al.*, 2009; Brownless and Finch, 2010). In particular, there is a reported lack of knowledge on how to identify suspected child victims of trafficking outside of asylum work.

In other children's social care teams, and amongst health and education workers and within the voluntary sector and community and faith groups, there are few opportunities to learn about the issue.

As a result of this lack of awareness, there is potential for many young people who are trafficked to remain undetected. For example, unaccompanied children's teams are not responsible for supporting young people in private fostering arrangements or supporting any other children from abroad who may present to a local authority but do not claim asylum. It is reported that where referrals have been made (perhaps by schools) these are often done on the basis of personal working relationships rather than a broader strategic framework (ECPAT UK and Save the Children, 2007a).

A number of reports also point to the need for improved awareness among the general public (see for example Pearce *et al.*, 2009; The Children's Society, 2009), or among young people to equip them with knowledge and skills to identify indicators and to feel confident about what to do if they, or friends, are at risk. There is evidence that trafficking cases have been brought to the attention of professionals through a friend of a child reporting their concerns (Pearce *et al.*, 2009).

Although not discussed in interviews for this review it could be argued that there is the potential for a 'vicious cycle' in relation to awareness and training and identifying trafficking. We found that some local authorities felt they did not need to facilitate training on trafficking because it is

not a priority in their area as they do not have any trafficked children. Given the hidden nature of trafficking it may be that the lack of awareness of indicators among their workers is undermining their ability to identify it, thereby perpetuating an under-reporting of child trafficking.

Key findings concerning awareness raising and training in trafficked children

- Across the research respondents identified a gap in training and awareness of trafficking issues
- More public awareness and information specifically for young people was considered necessary so that people could identify trafficking
- Across all agencies working with children and young people it was felt that they needed to be more aware of trafficking and know what to do if they had suspicion
- Specifically the police, immigration, youth offending, criminal justice system, health and education were identified as needing specific training
- Social workers and social work managers across all teams were seen as needing a better understanding of child trafficking.

4.8 National level

In a number of previous sections respondents have highlighted areas where they feel that practice needs to be developed at a national level. This has included:

- Looking at models of providing appropriate accommodation such as reciprocal arrangements, flexible funding models or a national specialist foster care programme
- A national database for missing trafficked children
- A guardianship model to support trafficked children
- A review of the NRM, and the Home Office prioritising the immigration decision making process for LAC trafficked children moving into/through the transition phase.

In addition to these suggestions, some respondents felt that at a Government level there needed to be a re-think on trafficked children as currently responsibility for them falls across a number of government departments. A number of respondents pointed to the forced marriage unit as a potentially good model. A local authority manager suggested that Ofsted should inspect services for trafficked children and undertake a themed inspection on this issue.

Conclusions

The evidence gathered in this research from both children who had been trafficked, and stakeholders who have been involved in their care, has identified areas where there is an urgent need to recognise and address current failings within the system. The prevalence of negative and damaging experiences among the children interviewed, echoed in professionals' responses, suggests that there is a need for rapid improvements in the identification of, and support provided to, these vulnerable young people. The following summarises the main conclusions and suggests areas for improvement at local, national and cross-departmental levels.

Discovery and identification of trafficked children

Trafficked children can have very little opportunity to escape their traffickers and exploiters. They do not have a clear understanding of what is happening to them, or knowledge of their rights and sources of support available once discovered. This means the emphasis has to be put upon adults having awareness of the indicators of trafficking to enable discovery and identification. This awareness is particularly important for those whose decisions may impact on their care arrangements, such as the police, immigration officers and legal representatives. This review has shown that when a child has not been recognised as being trafficked, or been identified as a child, young people have been criminalised and ended up in prison or adult immigration detention centres.

There was a serious concern about private fostering arrangements and how these can be used to hide trafficked children.

Trafficked children going missing

Stakeholders raised concerns about trafficked children's vulnerability to going missing, particularly soon after discovery. There was agreement that quick action had to be taken to minimise risk, such as developing a multi-agency safety plan, securing safe accommodation, working with specialist, trained and supported foster carers, providing intensive one-to-one support and the forming of a trusting relationship with an independent adult.

Some respondents felt that strategies to prevent trafficked children going missing should include the option to access support beyond the local area, such as the use of reciprocal arrangements between local authorities or a national specialist foster care programme.

When trafficked children do go missing, there was a call for a different response to that for other children who go missing from local authority care. There is a strong possibility that children return to their traffickers in these circumstances and therefore their cases should be considered in a similar way to abduction cases and treated accordingly by local authorities and the police.

Use of current guidance and multi-agency working

Stakeholders felt that current guidance and toolkits that contained information about the indicators of trafficking were helpful, but some respondents felt there was little understanding of

how those indicators should be incorporated in assessment processes, as a guide on how to reduce risk and as a way of determining the most appropriate services for a child.

Stakeholders felt the responses to working with children who have been trafficked should be primarily dealt with as a child protection and safeguarding issue, with a need for some specialism to ensure that trafficked children's particular needs and circumstances were understood and acted upon.

Effective multi-agency working was highlighted as being important in providing the right type of support to trafficked children. Key areas identified as working well at a local level included: provision of training across faiths and cultures; effective working with local police; establishment of a sub-group of the LSCB; multi-agency strategy meetings about individual cases; appointing specialist workers or commissioning local voluntary sector organisations to provide training and support; developing a communications strategy about private fostering across LSCB partners. The success of such multi-agency working was seen as being influenced by the level of importance placed upon the issue by local authorities. It should be noted that some of those who placed importance on this issue, and had processes in place, were not necessarily those that had high numbers of trafficked children in their areas.

Although government guidance (Department for Education and Home Office, 2011) has recommendations on strategic approaches to responding to trafficking, this review found that few local authorities in the sample had implemented this guidance by developing multi-agency strategic or operational groups focussing on trafficking, or undertaken local needs assessments.

Supporting trafficked children

Stakeholders emphasised that supporting trafficked children needed to be done with an emphasis on child protection, an approach that is sometimes compromised by a child's uncertain immigration status. Local authorities identified a lack of understanding among social workers of the immigration system and pressures relating to the immigration process as being a barrier to supporting trafficked children.

Ten of the children in this research had their ages disputed, and some had undergone multiple age assessments before it was agreed by the authorities that they were children. Age assessments were reported to be taking place in unsuitable settings, such as police stations, and the result of such assessments have an important impact on the type of care and support that people receive. For the young people in this study, the consequences of having their age incorrectly identified were that they were placed in adult prison or in immigration detention, or had been housed in shared accommodation for adults. In some cases having their age disputed meant that young people felt they could not trust their social workers.

In this sample, only a minority of the young people were happy with the care and support they had received from their social workers. Although some individual social workers were identified as having been supportive, practice varied widely. Young people often had multiple social workers or key workers, resulting in little continuity of care and children having to frequently repeat their stories of the traumatic abuse and exploitation they had experienced. Local authorities reported that they sometimes experience barriers to providing an allocated permanent social worker, and stakeholders emphasised that whoever supports the child needs the skills to manage complex situations.

Young people's criticisms of the care provided were centred around a lack of contact, not being listened to and social workers not doing the things they were supposed to. There were examples of where action was only taken by social workers because voluntary sector organisations and welfare solicitors had become involved and argued for the services and support required.

Local authorities reported that having insufficient accommodation presented a barrier to providing effective support. Stakeholders noted that inappropriate accommodation can pose risks to trafficked children, and have a detrimental effect on their ability to access education and leisure. Some young people reported multiple moves and being placed in accommodation where they lived in fear.

Local authorities identified that they faced some difficulties in providing appropriate education, mental health services and leisure opportunities for trafficked children. Stakeholders emphasised the importance of trafficked children participating in education and noted that some received incorrect advice about entitlements from social workers and/or solicitors.

Transition to adult services and adulthood

Like all children who are looked after by a local authority, turning 18 can trigger a change in the type of support trafficked children will receive. For this group there is also the added issue of the decision making process on their immigration status.

Stakeholders were concerned that the reduction in support and services for these young people increases their vulnerability. This could put them at risk of being re-trafficked.

Pathway planning should take place to support children through transition. Most local authorities reported undertaking pathway planning, but the quality of this planning was questioned by stakeholders. Trafficked young people reported not understanding the pathway planning process, felt unsupported and that they did not have the life skills to move to independent accommodation at 18 and cope with their situation.

The child's understanding of the process

Stakeholders and young people highlighted that the care process can be confusing for trafficked children. Many people were involved in children's lives and children did not understand their roles or what support they were supposed to receive.

Children described the help they had received from voluntary sector organisations and solicitors to explain what was happening and advocate for them when support was lacking or inappropriate. Stakeholders echoed this and throughout this research highlighted the need for there to be a trusted adult in trafficked children's lives, who was independent from statutory services and could help children to navigate the care, immigration and criminal justice processes, and to challenge service providers who were not meeting their entitlements. A guardianship model was identified as a way to meet this need.

Training and awareness of trafficking

Throughout the research, participants identified a gap in training and awareness of trafficking issues at various levels. Stakeholders felt there was a need for all agencies working with children

to be aware of trafficking and to know what course of action to take if they suspect that a child they have contact with may have been trafficked. Training for the police, immigration officials, staff in the youth offending and criminal justice system, and those working in the health and education sectors was said to be necessary. Social workers and their managers were also identified as needing a better understanding of child trafficking. It was also felt that if more members of the general public have an awareness of trafficking, this could lead to more young people being discovered and removed from exploitative situations.

5.1 Areas for improvement

Support provided for children who have been trafficked can be identified for improvement at three levels. These relate to the local, national, and cross-departmental and multi-agency level.

At the local level, areas identified relate to work directly with trafficked children. This in particular includes the identification and response to trafficked children and then need for increased training and implementation of existing guidance.

At the national level, findings suggest central government needs to be more influential in sending a clear message to local agencies reminding them of their statutory duties and the available guidance. There is also a need to address the constraints posed by policy which impacts on agencies' abilities to meet the welfare needs of children and to provide effective care.

Finally there is room for improvement in how government departments ensure their policies do not undermine each other and therefore areas of focus include ways to improve multi-agency working at different levels.

Local level

- 1 All agencies working with potential child victims of trafficking – particularly local authorities, youth offending services, police, immigration and border staff, health and education professionals, and non-governmental organisations – need to ensure that a child protection response is implemented when a child is suspected of being trafficked. This includes conducting a proper assessment of the child's needs and a multi-agency child protection investigation.
- 2 Local authorities must ensure that if a separated child under 18 is identified, including older children aged 16 and 17, that he or she is treated as a child in need and accommodated, supported and supervised according to their welfare needs as set out in law and in statutory guidance. This would ensure that separated children who may later be identified as having been trafficked are properly supported from first identification.
- 3 Anyone responding to referrals of trafficked or potentially trafficked children should follow the Achieving Best Evidence Guidance²⁸ and be trained accordingly.
- 4 Understanding of child trafficking and the statutory responsibilities to safeguard all children, regardless of their immigration status, nationality or documentation needs to

28 Achieving Best Evidence in Criminal Proceedings Guidance on interviewing victims and witnesses, and guidance on using special measures: <http://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/victims-and-witnesses/vulnerable-witnesses/achieving-best-evidence-criminal-proceedings.pdf>

be increased. This should be done through raising awareness and increased training, particularly involving those in statutory and non-statutory agencies working with potential victims of trafficking.

- 5 All agencies need to ensure they widely implement all statutory and practice guidance for safeguarding trafficked and separated children. All professionals should view potentially trafficked children as children first and foremost and entitled to a child protection response as a foundation for effective, protective interagency collaboration.

National level

- 6 National responses to all potential victims of child trafficking need to be implemented. This should include ensuring there are sufficient, appropriate options for good quality accommodation and care that mean all children have a full-time carer and are kept safe. This may include moving them away from the area where they would be at risk of being targeted by their traffickers or going missing.
- 7 A system of protection needs to be developed which includes an independent trusted adult appointed to a separated child as soon as they come to an authority's attention. This person's role would ensure that all potential victims of trafficking are able to understand their rights, ensure that their voice is heard in decisions that affect them and are supported effectively through the different legal processes they are engaged in.

Cross-departmental and multi-agency working

- 8 The benefit of the doubt with respect to a young person's claimed age should be applied more consistently and throughout by all immigration staff and local authorities. Bearing in mind that documentation is not likely to show their real age, it should be given little weight in the age assessment.
- 9 If there is good reason to doubt a young person's claimed age, a lawful age assessment should be conducted with input from a range of organisations that have had contact with the young person including statutory agencies and voluntary organisations. This would ensure that relevant evidence is collected early on so as to avoid lengthy and multiple assessments which negatively impact on the well-being of these young people.
- 10 Statutory guidance on conducting lawful age assessments should be developed for local authorities to ensure a consistent, holistic and child-centred approach.
- 11 A Children's Rights Impact Assessment should be undertaken when all new government policies and legislation are developed. This would guard against negative impact on potential child victims of trafficking and ensure adherence to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and duties in UK legislation regarding the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.
- 12 A national system of data collection for trafficked children need to be established to ensure better monitoring of children going missing from care. This should be implemented in every local area and be monitored by those with overall safeguarding responsibilities within existing structures, at different levels of government. An annual national report

could track progress made in this area, by setting out how many separated children including potential victims of trafficking were referred to local authorities, how many went missing from care and if and when these children were found.

- 13 Given the hidden nature of this abuse and exploitation, there is a need for trafficked children and young people to have a direct voice within decision-making processes and a need for better awareness of the experiences faced by trafficked children at different levels of government. One way in which this could be addressed is through the establishment of a quarterly meeting between separated children including trafficked children and young people and Ministers, to ensure their voices are heard directly and that progress towards better care and protection arrangements is made. This could be facilitated by local authorities and NGOs and could replicate the work of the Children's Minister who meets directly with children in care and care leavers.

5.2 Areas for further research

This review has provided some insights into this under-researched area. However, as this was a small-scale scoping review it does still leave gaps in the evidence base and a need for more in-depth examination in a number of areas, particularly in terms of the identification of good practice. The following issues require further exploration:

- A more in-depth examination of models of multi-agency approaches to better understand what specifically works to support these children and how precisely this leads to better outcomes for trafficked children
- Further examination of trafficked children's involvement in the care process to look at which processes, structures and resources can help trafficked children better understand what is happening to them and enable them to have a voice within their care and protection plan
- Evaluation of models of good practice: for example, the piloting of a system of guardianship, specialist foster care arrangements or local authority reciprocal arrangements for accommodation
- A more in-depth examination of the transition process for trafficked young people including an examination of their long-term outcomes after leaving care.

Although there has already been some progress in helping the victims of child trafficking in recent years, the voices of young people and those that work with them in this study clearly show that much more still needs to be done. It is vital that as soon as children come into contact with any agency that they are given the help they need to be kept safe and that they are able to fully recover from their experiences.

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