



**STOP**

**SEX TRAFFICKING  
OF CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE**



# SEX TRAFFICKING OF CHILDREN IN

## THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND

### What is child trafficking?

The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation.

UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime

A child is anyone under the age of 18 years.

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### What's the problem?

#### GLOBAL SEX TRAFFICKING

Human trafficking is a complex phenomenon fueled by the tremendous growth in the global sex market. Exploitation is driven by poverty, uneven development, official corruption, gender discrimination, harmful traditional and cultural practices, civil unrest, natural disasters and lack of political will to end it.

The number of child victims trafficked worldwide for sexual exploitation or cheap labour on an annual basis is 1.2 million.<sup>1</sup> Human trafficking, the third largest international crime, following illegal drugs and arms trafficking, is believed to be worth billions of dollars each year. Driving the trade is the demand for commercial sexual exploitation. Seventy-nine percent of all global trafficking is for sexual exploitation.<sup>2</sup>



Largest Global Criminal Activities



## CHILD SEX TRAFFICKING IN THE UK

Children are trafficked across the world and to the UK from a wide range of countries. While trafficking for sexual exploitation remains the most common form of child trafficking, UK children are also trafficked for other types of exploitation including labour exploitation, forced participation in criminal activities, forced marriage, illegal adoption and domestic servitude. Even children who are not trafficked for the explicit purpose of sexual exploitation are vulnerable to rape and sexual abuse because of the dangerous and hidden circumstances in which they are kept. For example, young girls trafficked from Africa who are forced into domestic servitude easily become vulnerable to sexual exploitation.

Establishing actual numbers of children trafficked into the UK is as difficult as it is in other countries because of the complex, hidden and illegal nature of trafficking. ECPAT UK has produced groundbreaking research into child trafficking, interviewing practitioners from children's services, law-enforcement and NGOs, in London in 2004, in the North-West, North-East and West Midlands in 2007 and in Wales in 2009.

In April 2009, the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP), which is a government agency under the responsibility of the Home Office, published a 'Strategic Threat Assessment on Child Trafficking in the UK.' The CEOP report identified 325 children in the UK as trafficked during the period from March 2007 to February 2008. These children came from 52 countries including China, Afghanistan, Nigeria, Romania and Vietnam. CEOP suggests that this figure has been underestimated.<sup>3</sup> ECPAT UK also believes this is far lower than the real figure because there is limited awareness of trafficking, restricted ability to identify trafficked children by front line law enforcement and children's services, confusion on the part of the children who may not understand their circumstances, and the number of children who remain undiscovered by any authority.

A Home Office study of organised crime markets suggested that at any one time in 2003 there could have been around 4000 (child and adult) victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation in the UK.<sup>4</sup>

Children may be at greater risk of trafficking from places where they are less protected. This may be because the law is weak or not properly enforced or because children are less aware of the risks of trafficking and are more easily deceived. Countries are considered:

- 'Sending' or 'origin' - from where children are sent;
- 'Transit' - where the children might be moved through and temporarily kept on the way to their final destination; and
- 'Receiving' or 'destination' - where the children finally end up.

Depending on the reason for trafficking, some countries might be only sending, while others might be both sending and transit. Some countries can be all three. The UK is primarily a destination country although, to a lesser extent, is used as a transit country to other parts of Europe.

Established ports like Dover, Heathrow and Gatwick are significant entry points to the UK, but increasingly traffickers use diverse routes such as regional airports and lorry drops on motorways in less predictable locations. Airports are the most commonly used means of entry followed by seaports. Boys are more likely than girls to enter the country via clandestine methods, including in the back of lorries.

## MISSING CHILDREN

An additional cause for concern are the numbers of children who once identified, disappear from state care. ECPAT UK's research in three regions of England (North-West, North-East and West Midlands) entitled, *Missing Out* identified 80 cases of known or suspected child victims of trafficking. Alarmingly, 48 (60%) of these children had gone missing from social services care and have never been found. These high numbers of missing children found by ECPAT UK were supported by CEOP's initial scoping report into child trafficking in the UK. Of 330 children identified by ECPAT UK, it was found that 183 (53%) had gone missing. *Missing Out* revealed that the high numbers of trafficked children who go missing may either still be under the control of traffickers while in care and disappear because the trafficker has regained control over them, or they run away from fear of being found by the trafficker. In both scenarios, the children are in highly vulnerable situations.<sup>5</sup>

## Who gets trafficked?

Children are trafficked to the UK from a wide range of countries, including China, Afghanistan, Nigeria, Romania, Vietnam, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Kenya and Ukraine. Many of the suspected or known cases of trafficked children in the UK do not come directly from their countries of origin, but enter through transit countries within Europe, Africa, the Middle East and Asia.<sup>6</sup>

Almost half of the children identified in the 2009 CEOP report were 16 or 17 years old, just under a third were 14 or 15 and 15% were under 11. Two thirds of these children were girls.<sup>7</sup> The majority of girls trafficked to the UK are moved for purposes of sexual exploitation, followed by domestic servitude. Boys are known to be trafficked for labour and domestic servitude. The purpose of their exploitation is often less identifiable, but cases of boys sexually abused in an organised form of prostitution have also been reported. In 2009, ECPAT UK published research on trafficked children in Wales, which uncovered more boy victims of trafficking than girls.<sup>8</sup> This was an unusual finding, but remains consistent with recent trends of increased numbers of trafficked boys identified over the past two years.

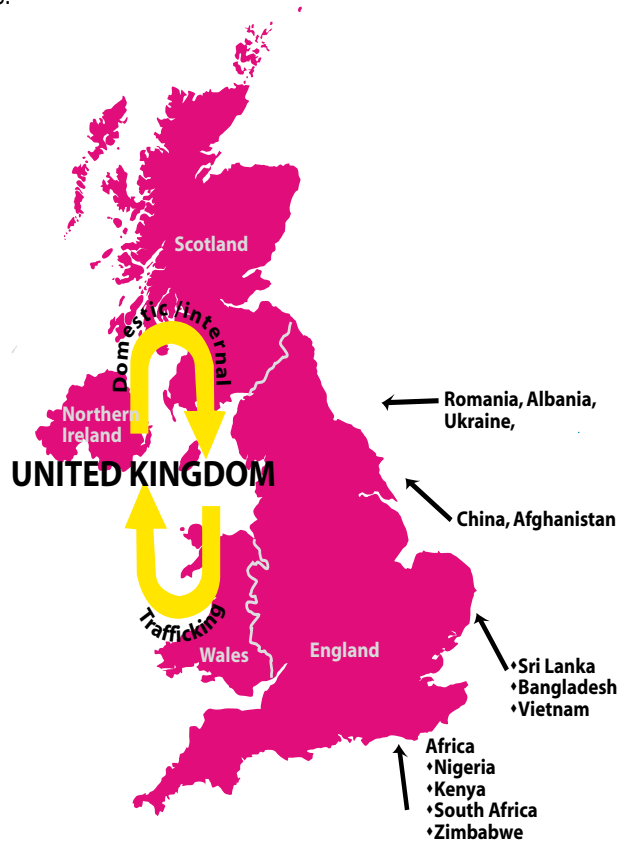
Many of these children are also forced into debt bondage; the CEOP report found children were forced to repay money to their traffickers ranging from £5000 to £40,000.<sup>9</sup>

Children who come to the UK are rarely aware of the reality of their situation and do not understand that they have been trafficked. These children will typically come from disadvantaged situations of poverty and lack of opportunity. They are especially vulnerable because they are often less educated, easy to overpower and easy to convince that they must do what an adult tells them to do. They are also often in a position where they believe they must help support their family and may have even been sold or sent abroad by family members themselves.

Many girls trafficked into prostitution report severe forms of physical and sexual violence employed by their traffickers to control them, and mention being raped repeatedly until compliance. Traffickers also threaten to harm their families and use various methods of coercion and intimidation. This is especially true for girls from Eastern Europe and Western and Eastern Africa, some of the latter also being influenced and controlled through fear of ritual witchcraft and voodoo practices. Trafficked children commonly report being locked up and only gain the attention of the authorities when they manage to escape after several years

of being held captive. Experts and case evidence constantly corroborate the fact that trafficked children are at high risk of being re-trafficked and are extremely vulnerable to repeat abuse.

- For child trafficking, the **UK** is primarily considered as a:
- origin country
  - ✓ transit country
  - ✓ destination country
  - ✓ internal/domestic country



## Who creates demand?

The recent CEOP report demonstrates that there is an ongoing demand for trafficked children in the UK for prostitution, and exploitative labour.<sup>10</sup>

Traffickers prey on children and young people to meet the sexual demands of paedophiles and people who pay for sex. Any person who patronises the commercial sex market may end up sexually exploiting a child. There is actually no common profile of perpetrators who sexually exploit children – they may be young, old, married, single; they come from all kinds of socio-economic backgrounds and work in all kinds of professions.

Children who have been trafficked from abroad for sexual exploitation have been identified all over the UK, indicating that this is not just a problem for inner city London. A number of small-scale studies suggest that the demand for prostitution is increasing in the UK fuelled by the availability of online child pornography. Police operations in the north of England have uncovered the online and offline grooming of British teenage girls that resulted in the girls being transported across the UK and pimped for sexual exploitation.

Demand is not just about the people who buy sex but the many people who seek to make easy money by facilitating the arrangements. British nationals have also been prosecuted for the sexual abuse of children abroad in countries such as Ghana, Dominican Republic, Sri Lanka, India, Thailand, Romania, and the Czech Republic but also in Sweden, France and Spain.<sup>11</sup>

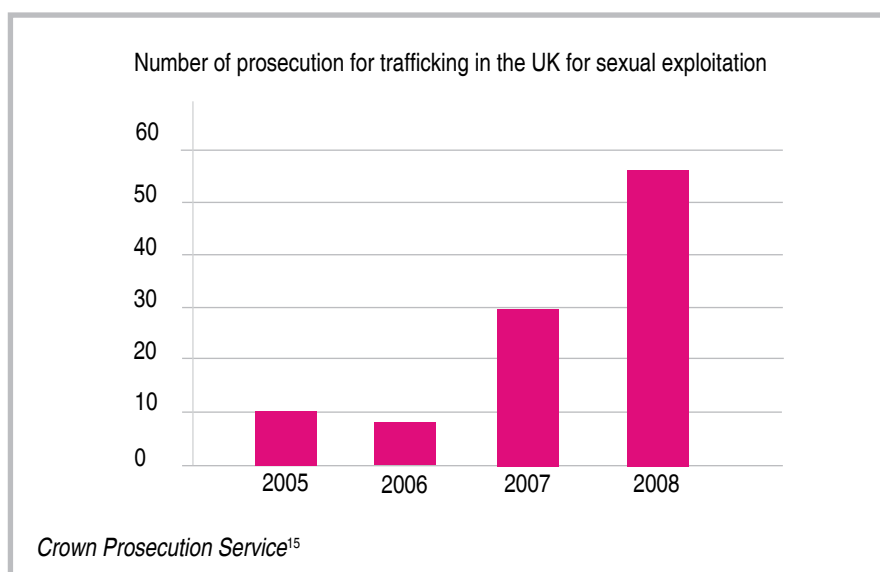
## Who are the traffickers?

Traffickers can be a stranger or someone the child knows, such as a relative or a friend. Traffickers of sexual exploitation are often part of an organised criminal network of varying levels that 'recruit' children and supply them with fake identification. However, there are many cases reported of individuals trafficking and sexually exploiting one or more victims. They may pose as boyfriends in order to convince children to leave for a better life. There have been several reports of Eastern European girls lured by enticing promises from their 'boyfriends' only to be trafficked into prostitution in Western Europe.

The UK has undertaken two major law enforcement operations targeting traffickers. The first operation in 2006, Pentameter 1, resulted in the rescue of 88 victims who originated from a number of countries primarily in Eastern Europe, East and South East Asia, Africa and South America, 12 of whom were children. As a result, 232 arrests were made and 134 people were charged with a variety of offences. Under Operation Pentameter 2 (which concluded in 2008) there were a total of 167 victims recovered from similar regions, including 13 children.<sup>12</sup> Traffickers also include those who use children for criminal activity. Trafficked boys have been arrested during police drug raids for organised cannabis growing. Sadly, many of these mostly Vietnamese children continue to be charged as criminals rather than identified as victims of trafficking. Evidence also highlights the trafficking of children, in particular Somali and Romanian girls, for the purpose of under-age and forced marriage or for various types of street crime, such as pick-pocketing.<sup>13</sup>

The Crown Prosecution Service's (CPS) records show that during the period October 2007 to September 2008, 125 prosecutions were brought on charges alleging trafficking for sexual exploitation.<sup>14</sup> The Government did not disaggregate the data to explain which convictions relate to child or adult trafficking offences and as such, specific data on child traffickers is not available to better understand trends in convictions and law enforcement.

The following table shows the number of trafficking offences in the United Kingdom for sexual exploitation where a prosecution commenced (not the number of defendants prosecuted):



## CASE STUDIES

### **Trafficker Arrested**

Six men were sentenced for up to 14 years imprisonment for trafficking a 16 year old girl, “N”, from Slovakia for sexual exploitation in the UK. She was tricked by a false promise of a job and then sold from owner to owner. Her exploiters, UK citizens, but also Slovakian, Turk and Albanian men were convicted for running brothels, controlling a child in prostitution, and trafficking a child into and within the UK for sexual exploitation. “N” had been prostituted in different brothels in Cambridgeshire, Bedfordshire and Middlesex before being rescued by Scotland Yard.<sup>16</sup>

### **Trafficked child sold back into prostitution after rescue**

A teenage girl from Albania was trafficked into Italy for prostitution, where she was brutally raped and physically abused until she was made a drug addict. She was recovered by the Italian authorities and returned to Albania, only to be sold back to another set of traffickers who brought her to the UK and forced her back into prostitution.<sup>17</sup>

### **Trafficked into prostitution across Europe**

“M” was forced into prostitution in a sauna in London after being recruited in her home country, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) at the age of 13. She was trafficked across the Sahara, through Spain and to Turin, Italy, where she was prostituted for 2 years. She was later ‘rescued’ by a man who came to the sauna on a regular basis. Her case closely reflects what is known of the route and process used by traffickers of young girls from the DRC to Italy and then to the UK.<sup>18</sup>

### **Trafficked from Lithuania and then internally to different brothels**

“A” was 17 when she was recruited by a trafficker from a children’s home in Lithuania. When she arrived in the UK via Dover Port with three or four other females in 2007, they were directly taken to a brothel and forced into prostitution in North-West England. She was then moved to another brothel in South West Wales. She was rescued by the police from a brothel in South Wales within 24 hours, after she contacted her home in Lithuania and called for help to return to the children’s home. She was placed in a safe house and disclosed her case to the Serious Organised Crime Agency.<sup>19</sup>

## How can we stop the trafficking of children?

ECPAT UK has been campaigning to end the sexual exploitation of children since 1994. While the Government has begun to take the issue of trafficking seriously, it has clearly recognised child trafficking as a form of child abuse and is committed to making the UK a hostile environment for any form of human trafficking. ECPAT UK is part of an international movement of ECPAT groups working in over 75 countries to end the exploitation of children. Child trafficking cannot be solved by individual countries but requires cooperation between countries, police forces and other agencies across countries. The international ECPAT network provides an important global advocacy alliance able to share information, share ideas to combat trafficking and to campaign for the rights of child victims of trafficking.

## LAW AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

### **Recommendation 1 – Law enforcement and implementation of legal guidance**

In order for the UK to truly become a ‘hostile’ environment for child trafficking, traffickers must believe that their crimes will be investigated and prosecuted and that those prosecutions will involve lengthy prison sentences and serious financial penalties. There have been less than 10 convictions for child trafficking under the UK trafficking laws. ECPAT UK would like to see higher numbers of prosecutions and longer sentences given to traffickers. While traffickers often escape the serious punishment merited by their crimes, children forced into criminal activities by their traffickers are being prosecuted despite guidance which says this should not happen. ECPAT UK is campaigning to end the prosecution of children for crimes they are forced to take part in.

### **Recommendation 2 – Trafficking Rapporteur**

ECPAT UK believes an independent watchdog (also called a Rapporteur) is needed to ensure that the policies the Government develops can reduce child trafficking and ensure survivors are adequately supported. The launch in recent years of the UK Action Plan on Tackling Human Trafficking and the setting up of the current structures – the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP), the Serious Organised Crime Agency (SOCA) and the UK Human Trafficking Centre (UK HTC), as well as the Inter-Departmental Ministerial Group on Human Trafficking are all important developments. However, the creation of a national watchdog would make a great difference in the way these agencies work together. An independent National Rapporteur on Trafficking should be appointed to collect, monitor and analyse data on trafficked children, examining trends and emerging issues and develop independent oversight and recommendations for improvement in the implementation of the Government’s National Action Plan on Tackling Human Trafficking.

### **Recommendation 3 – improved treatment of immigrant children**

Children from the European Union member countries (except for Romania and Bulgaria) have a right of entry to the UK, however children from other countries do not. Many trafficked children are simply processed as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, being treated more like unwanted immigrants than children with particular needs and vulnerabilities. Despite Government assurances that asylum-seeking children in the UK ‘receive adequate care, protection and support’, evidence from a variety of sources suggests that this is not the case and that many vulnerable children are being failed by the system. Trafficked children who cannot return home because of fear of traffickers routinely have their asylum claims rejected and must await deportation. Child victims of trafficking should be granted renewable residence permits in the UK to allow for their long-term complete recovery from the exploitation they have suffered.

## PREVENTION OF CHILD TRAFFICKING AND VICTIM PROTECTION AND ASSISTANCE

### **Recommendation 4 – Guardianship**

Once trafficked children have been identified they need to be given a high level of practical care and support, but also need to be looked after and protected. The UK Government is committed to ensuring the safety and well-being of all children in the UK. Local Authorities have a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of any child in need. All trafficked children once

identified and if in need of continuing support and care become the responsibility of a Local Authority. However, the numbers of trafficked children who go missing demonstrate the failures of current arrangements. ECPAT UK would like to see a system of guardianship introduced for children who currently have nobody to act as their parent or in their best interest. A guardian would advocate on the child's behalf, represent the child's best interests and assist the child in accessing all the legal, psychosocial, education and other care services needed in identifying a durable solution. A system of guardianship would be a crucial step to ensuring that these children no longer go missing.

### **Recommendation 5 - Training**

A greater awareness of child trafficking is needed for real progress to be made on the sexual exploitation of children. ECPAT UK's recent research in Wales found a failure on the part of children's services to recognise trafficking as a problem they faced. Although in recent years there has been growing awareness of trafficking, to ensure protection of all child victims of trafficking it is essential for all children's services and other frontline agencies like the police and immigration services to be aware of trafficking and able to identify child victims of trafficking.

### **Recommendation 6 – Greater coordination between agencies**

As part of the UK's obligations under the Council of Europe Trafficking Convention, the Government has introduced a National Referral Mechanism which is a co-operative framework to identify, protect and promote the human rights of trafficked persons in co-ordination with civil society. It is hoped that this process will improve the care of child victims of trafficking with the implementation of clear processes and their greater vulnerability recognised. Following the implementation of the Trafficking Convention, it is hoped that greater awareness and a uniform system of identification, assessment and awareness of trafficking will be shared by law enforcement agencies, children's services and NGOs.

### **TO REPORT A SUSPECTED INCIDENT OF CHILD TRAFFICKING, CONTACT:**

- Report to your local police or your local Children's Services or dial 999
- Report to CRIMESTOPPERS on 0800 555 111
- Contact the UK Human Trafficking Centre on 0114 252 3891 or [info@ukhtc.org](mailto:info@ukhtc.org)
- Contact the National Child Trafficking Advice and Information Line (CTAIL) for free, on 0800 107 7057 (lines are open from 9.30am-4.30pm on weekdays) or email [ctail@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:ctail@nspcc.org.uk)

### **MORE INFORMATION**

- ECPAT UK: [www.ecpat.org.uk](http://www.ecpat.org.uk)
- ECPAT International: [www.ecpat.net](http://www.ecpat.net)
- The Body Shop and ECPAT Stop Trafficking of Children and Young People Campaign : [www.thebodyshop.com/stop](http://www.thebodyshop.com/stop)

## FURTHER READING

CEOP, *A Scoping Project on Child Trafficking in the UK*, June 2007, London. Accessed from [http://www.ceop.gov.uk/downloads/documents/child\\_trafficking\\_report0607.pdf](http://www.ceop.gov.uk/downloads/documents/child_trafficking_report0607.pdf)

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*Bordering on Concern – Child Trafficking in Wales*, March 2009  
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*Return to Sender: British child sex offenders abroad - why more must be done*  
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*Rights Here, Rights Now: Recommendations for Protecting Trafficked Children*  
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*Missing Out: A Study of Child Trafficking in the North-West, North-East and West Midlands*  
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*What the Professionals Know: The Trafficking of Children into and through the UK for Sexual Purposes*  
ECPAT UK, 2001  
<http://www.ecpat.org.uk/publications.html>

*Global Report on Trafficking in Persons*  
United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)  
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## Endnotes

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