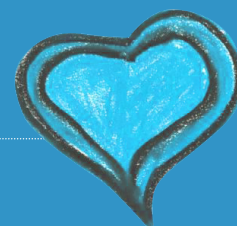


Creating Stable Futures: Human Trafficking, Participation and Outcomes for Children

Home Office Briefing



Background

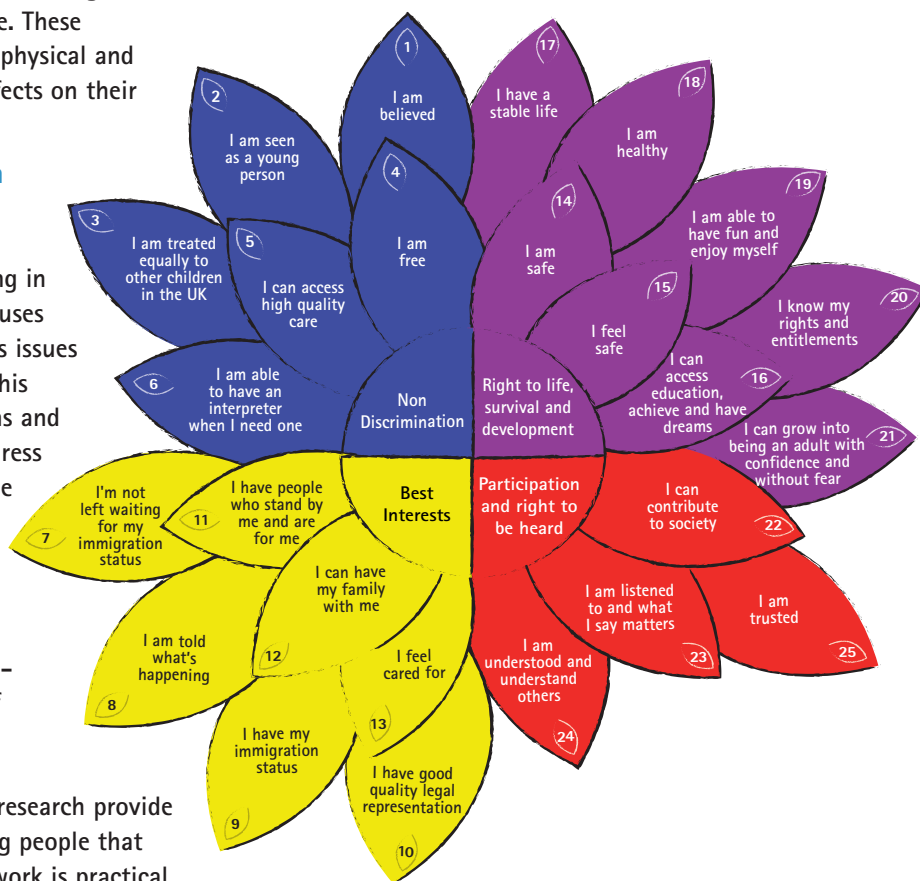
Child trafficking is child abuse and a severe violation of human rights affecting many countries worldwide, including the United Kingdom. Children who fall victim to trafficking are subjected to various forms of exploitation including criminal, labour, sexual, and domestic servitude. These children often experience severe trauma, both physical and psychological, which can have long-lasting effects on their development and wellbeing.

The report **Creating Stable Futures: Human Trafficking, Participation and Outcomes for Children** delves into the experiences and outcomes for child victims of human trafficking in the UK. A significant portion of the report focuses on the role of the Home Office and the various issues within its policies that affect these children. This detailed summary highlights these critical areas and outlines the recommendations provided to address these issues. As such, the report details the role of the Home Office and various issues within its policies that affect these children.

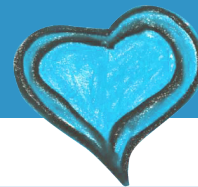
The findings of the research are structured around the four main principles of the United Nations Convention relating to Children – non-discrimination (Article 2), the best interests of the child (Article 3), the right to life, survival and development (Article 6) and the right to participation (Article 12). The findings of the research provide a framework for supporting children and young people that protects and promotes their rights. The framework is practical, child and young person-centred, and has wide applicability for local authority practice.

The views of young people and the findings of the research have been developed into a framework for supporting children and young people that protects and promotes their rights and focusses on positive outcomes identified both by and with them.'

The **Creating Stable Futures Positive Outcomes Framework (CSF-POF)** was developed with young victims of trafficking and details outcomes important and meaningful to them for positive changes to happen in their lives.



The **Creating Stable Futures Positive Outcomes Framework (CSF-POF)** is a practical and strategic tool designed with young people across three locations in England and Scotland to evaluate and enhance the effectiveness of services provided to trafficked children. It is the first time we know directly what young people consider necessary for meaningful change to happen in their own, and others, lives both now and in the future. Its implementation focuses on ensuring that these children achieve positive, sustainable outcomes in various aspects of their lives, including safety, health, education, and emotional wellbeing.



Despite various efforts and legislative measures aimed at combating human trafficking and supporting children, numerous challenges remain. Key issues identified in the report within the remit of the Home Office include:

1. Traumatising Immigration Processes:

The procedures for handling immigration and asylum claims are often lengthy and complex, which can exacerbate the trauma experienced by trafficked children. These processes can lead to prolonged periods of uncertainty and instability, negatively impacting the mental health and well-being of the children involved.

2. Restrictive Policies:

Current immigration and asylum policies are often seen as restrictive, limiting the opportunities for education, employment, and social integration for trafficked children. These limitations can hinder their recovery and development, leaving them vulnerable to further exploitation and abuse.

3. Implementation of Independent Child Trafficking Guardians

The report highlights that the implementation of Independent Child Trafficking Guardians, who are crucial for advocating on behalf of trafficked children, is inconsistent across regions. This inconsistency affects the ability of trafficked children to have their rights and best interests adequately represented.

4. Professional Attitudes and Discriminatory Practices:

Reports indicate that trafficked children frequently encounter discriminatory attitudes and practices from professionals within the immigration and social care systems. Such treatment can further traumatise these children and undermine their trust in the systems designed to protect them.

5. Lack of Child-Centred Approach:

There is a need for a more child-centred approach in the Home Office's policies and procedures. Currently, the focus often leans towards immigration enforcement and criminal justice, rather than prioritising the best interests and rights of trafficked children.

6. Bridge between support for adult and child survivors:

There is a considerable need for better linkage between child and adult support that recognises young people's transitional needs.

Legal and Policy Frameworks

The report stresses the importance of including trafficked children in the development of laws and policies that affect them. By ensuring their meaningful participation, the Home Office can create frameworks that truly reflect the needs and experiences of these children. This includes providing child-friendly information and conducting Child Rights Impact Assessments on new policies.

The Home Office's current focus on immigration enforcement and criminal justice often overshadows the need for child protection and safeguarding. The report calls for a realignment of priorities to ensure that the best interests of the children are at the forefront of all legal and policy decisions. This shift would involve integrating child protection approaches into the immigration and asylum processes.

Traumatising Immigration Processes

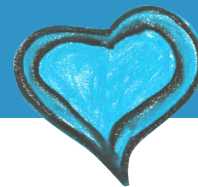
The report emphasises that the immigration and asylum system overseen by the Home Office often exacerbates the trauma experienced by child victims of trafficking and there is a subsequent need to reconsider these systems for children and young people to ensure they do not re-traumatise. Children frequently face prolonged periods of uncertainty

and stress due to lengthy asylum processes, which can lead to re-traumatisation. The Home Office is urged to create an immigration system that is sensitive to the unique vulnerabilities of these children, ensuring that the process does not further harm their mental and emotional well-being. In doing so, reframing migration narratives around the needs of children and young people, making the asylum process more child-friendly and ensuring the National Referral Mechanism process for children is more positive, compassionate, ethical and age-appropriate is vital.

Restrictive Policies

Current restrictive asylum and immigration laws are significant barriers to the recovery and positive outcomes for child victims of trafficking. These laws often limit children's access to education and employment opportunities, perpetuating a sense of powerlessness and vulnerability. The report suggests that the Home Office reevaluate and amend these policies to support the holistic development and empowerment of trafficked children.

The Home Office's procedures often hinder the recovery of trafficked children. These procedures can place children at further risk of exploitation and undermine their rights,



especially as they transition into adulthood. For instance, the lack of a streamlined process for granting indefinite leave to remain can leave children in a state of uncertainty, affecting their mental health and future prospects.

Implementation of Independent Child Trafficking Guardians

One of the key recommendations is the prompt assignment of independent legal guardians to children identified as potential victims of trafficking. These guardians would provide dedicated support and advocacy, ensuring that the children's best interests are represented in all legal and policy decisions. The report highlights the need for statutory guidance to ensure consistent implementation of this recommendation across all local authorities in England and Wales.

Currently, the Independent Child Trafficking Guardians service is available in only two-thirds of local authority areas and cuts off when children turn 18. This inconsistency leaves many trafficked children without the crucial support they need. The Home Office is called upon to ensure that all child victims have access to this service, regardless of their location.

Professional Attitudes and Discriminatory Practices

The report details young people's experiences of discriminatory attitudes from professionals, including social workers, police, and asylum caseworkers. Such attitudes often stem from a lack of understanding and empathy towards the children's traumatic experiences. This discrimination can lead to a lack of belief in their stories, further traumatising the children and hindering their recovery.

The Home Office must ensure that all professionals working with trafficked children adopt non-discriminatory and non-stigmatising practices. Training programmes and guidelines should be developed to promote empathy and understanding among professionals, helping them build trust with the children and provide quality support.

Lack of Child-Centred Approaches

The report advocates for a child-centred approach in all Home Office procedures. This approach should prioritise the well-being and best interests of the child, rather than focusing solely on immigration enforcement and criminal justice. By doing so, the Home Office can ensure that trafficked children receive the support and care they need to recover and thrive. Home Office employees should receive human trafficking training, including the ways in which child-specific forms of human trafficking take place, cultural competence, how to be trauma-informed in their work and details of child rights enshrined in the UK's UNCRC obligations.

Bridge between Child and Adult Services

At present there is a gap between child and adult service provision that places young people at risk of further exploitation during this transition. Post 18 Workers should be established as part of the Independent Child Trafficking Guardians service to ensure a bridge between child and adult services.

Implementation of the Positive Outcomes Framework

The Positive Outcomes Framework is proposed as a harm prevention tool to measure the effectiveness of current policies in achieving positive outcomes for identified child victims. The report suggests that the UK Government, including the Home Office, consider piloting this framework to evaluate and improve the support provided to trafficked children.

The Positive Outcomes Framework aims to assess not only the immediate impact of policies but also their long-term effects on the well-being and development of trafficked children. By adopting this framework, the Home Office can ensure that its policies and practices are truly beneficial to the children's future prospects.

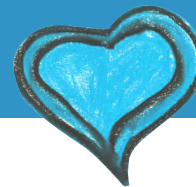
Child Rights Impact Assessments

To ensure that new policies do not negatively impact trafficked children, the Home Office should undertake Child Rights Impact Assessments. These assessments would evaluate the potential effects of proposed policies on the rights and well-being of trafficked children, ensuring that their voices are heard and considered in the decision-making process.

The report emphasises the importance of involving young people in the impact assessment process. By consulting with trafficked children and incorporating their feedback, the Home Office can develop policies that are more attuned to their needs and experiences.

Conclusion

The report underscores the critical role of the Home Office in addressing the needs and challenges faced by child victims of trafficking. It calls for a shift towards a more child-centred approach in all immigration and asylum processes, highlighting the importance of removing barriers to recovery, ensuring non-discriminatory practices, and providing comprehensive support services. By implementing the recommendations outlined in the report, the Home Office can significantly improve the prospects and well-being of trafficked children, ensuring that their rights are protected, and their voices are heard in all legal and policy decisions affecting their lives.



Recommendations

1. The UK Government and devolved administrations must ensure that all decisions about children in their individual cases and in the development of law and policy are made with their best interests as the primary consideration. The narrative around migration should be reframed and the asylum process made more empathetic, compassionate, ethical, age-appropriate and positive for children and young people.
2. The UK Government and devolved administrations must ensure mechanisms are in place for the meaningful participation of child victims in policies and interventions that affect them. These include providing child-friendly information, undertaking Child Rights Impact Assessments on emerging policies, building in a monitoring and impact evaluation process following the implementation of those policies and developing meaningful consultation with young people.
3. The UK Government and devolved administrations should find routes to participation of children and young people to inform legislation and policies that directly affect their lives.
4. The UK Government and devolved administrations must ensure that child victims of trafficking are always treated as children first and afforded their rights to the protection and care they need.
5. The UK Government and devolved administrations must ensure children identified as potential victims of slavery and trafficking are promptly assigned an independent legal guardian.
6. The UK Government and devolved administrations must commit to supporting positive outcomes for child victims in care, education and immigration as well as measuring the impact towards positive outcomes of the National Referral Mechanism.
7. The UK Government and devolved administrations should consider operationalising the Positive Outcomes Framework in a pilot study to measure the effectiveness of current policies in achieving positive outcomes for identified child victims.
8. The UK Government and devolved administrations should include a role for Post 18 Workers to be established as part of the Independent Child Trafficking Guardians service to ensure a bridge between child and adult services.
9. All frontline Home Office employees should receive human trafficking training, including child-specific forms of human trafficking, cultural competence, how to be trauma-informed in their work and the UK's UNCRC obligations.
10. The Home Office must ensure the immigration and asylum system does not re-traumatise children.
11. The Home Office must ensure that current barriers to the recovery and achievement of positive outcomes for child victims are removed. Procedures must not place children at risk of further exploitation nor undermine their rights with an emphasis on their transition into adulthood.
12. The Modern Slavery Unit at the Home Office should fund research into the root causes of human trafficking and, in particular, its child-specific forms.

ECPAT UK (Every Child Protected Against Trafficking) is a leading children's rights organisation working to protect children from trafficking and transnational exploitation. Our vision is that *children everywhere enjoy their rights to be protected and to live free from trafficking and exploitation*. Our mission is to promote and uphold children's rights in the UK and outside of the UK by informing, educating and researching child trafficking and exploitation, increasing awareness of and campaigning to end child trafficking and exploitation, standing with children and young people affected by exploitation and working collaboratively for change. Our work is rights-based, child-centred and trauma-informed.

The Helena Kennedy Centre for International Justice at Sheffield Hallam University is a leading centre for human rights and social justice. The Centre is home to a range of applied research, projects, education and scholarship including work around social justice, rights, law, policing, community justice, gender-based violence, refugee rights, human trafficking and modern slavery.

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