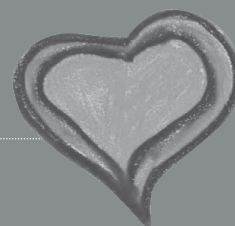


# Creating Stable Futures: Human Trafficking, Participation and Outcomes for Children

## Scottish Government Briefing



### Background

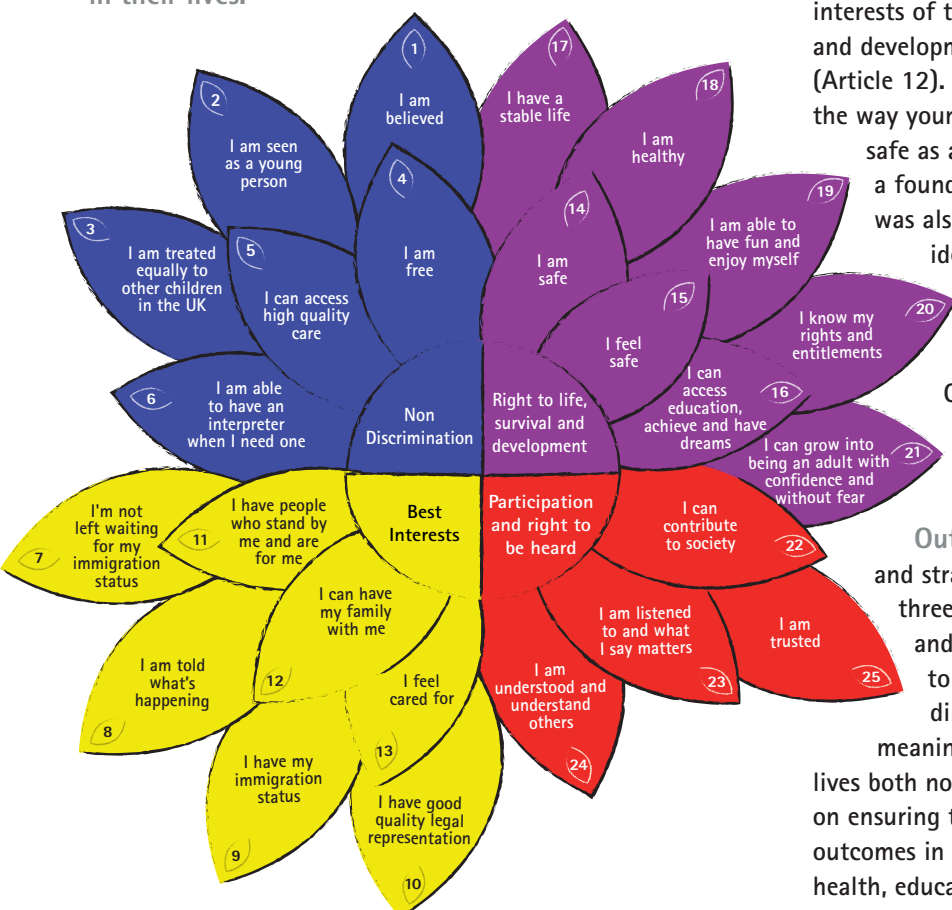
Child trafficking is child abuse and a severe violation of human rights affecting many countries worldwide, including within Scotland. Children who fall victim to trafficking are subjected to various forms of exploitation including criminal, labour, sexual, and domestic servitude. These children often 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** details experiences and outcomes for child victims of human trafficking in the UK. This research included the participation of young people in Scotland and England. These young people gave their views on what outcomes post-trafficking were important and meaningful for them. This detailed summary highlights these critical areas and outlines the recommendations provided to address these issues within Scottish legislative and policy frameworks which includes the first Guardianship service in the UK and the embedding of principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child into Scottish law.

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). A significant portion of the report focuses on the way young people highlighted the need to be and feel safe as an important outcome, recognising how this was a foundation for the realisation of other outcomes. It was also found that there are barriers to this that were identified by young people as being structural, systemic and discriminatory. The findings of the research and views of young people allowed for the development of a Positive Outcomes Framework for supporting children and young people that protects and promotes their rights.

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.

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.





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 Scottish Government include:

#### 1. Inconsistent Identification and Response to Trafficked Children

Local authorities often face challenges in consistently identifying and responding to trafficked children. This inconsistency can result from a lack of training and awareness among professionals, leading to missed opportunities to protect vulnerable children. Embedding topics such as immigration and asylum law and human trafficking as topics into both the social work and policing curriculums could address this.

#### 2. Resource Constraints

Many local authorities are constrained by limited resources, which affects their ability to provide comprehensive support services to trafficked children. This includes shortages in funding, staffing, foster care placements and specialized training necessary to address the complex needs of these children.

#### 3. Service Quality and Availability

There is significant variability in the quality and availability of specialist services for trafficked children across different local authorities. This inconsistency can lead to unequal access to necessary care and support, such as safe accommodation, health care, and education. An ethical approach to age assessments is necessary. The report highlights how the implementation of Independent Guardians are crucial for advocating on behalf of trafficked children and they should be resourced in line with the numbers of children and young people they work with.

#### 4. Discriminatory Attitudes and Practices

The report identifies instances of discriminatory attitudes and practices among professionals working with trafficked children. These attitudes can lead to a lack of belief in the children's experiences and contribute to further trauma, undermining the trust and support essential for their recovery.

#### 5. Lack of Child-Centred Approaches

A recurring issue is the insufficient use of relationship-based practice and child-centred approaches in the planning and delivery of services. The best interests of the child are not always the primary consideration in decision-making processes, which can negatively impact the effectiveness of the support provided.

#### 6. Participation and the Right to be Heard

The report detailed how little participation young people had in informing policies and/or practice that directly affected their lives.

### Inconsistent Identification and Responses to Trafficked Children

Local authorities play a crucial role in the identification of trafficked children. Effective identification involves being vigilant and aware of the signs of trafficking, which can include indicators of physical abuse, neglect, or psychological trauma. It also requires understanding the various contexts in which trafficking can occur, such as criminal exploitation, domestic servitude, labour exploitation and sexual exploitation. Responses also include a need to recognise that children and young people may have limited or constrained choices available to them which may create a risk of their going missing and further exploitation.

Ensuring that all professionals who come into contact with children, including educators, healthcare providers, and law enforcement, are trained to recognize the signs of trafficking. This includes understanding the cultural and linguistic barriers that may prevent children from disclosing their experiences.

Once identified, trafficked children require a comprehensive range of support services tailored to their specific needs. Local authorities are responsible for coordinating and providing these services, which are critical for the recovery and reintegration of

the child. Access to healthcare, including specialized services for mental health, is essential. Trafficked children often suffer from trauma-related conditions, and access to counselling and psychological support is crucial for their recovery.

Ensuring that trafficked children have access to education and vocational training opportunities is vital for their long-term integration and independence. Building a bridge between child and adult services is part of this. Local authorities must work to remove barriers to education, such as legal restrictions or language barriers. Efforts must be made to integrate trafficked children into the community, which includes fostering supportive relationships and networks. Community programmes and initiatives can help children build new skills and social connections.

### Resource Constraints

Local authorities often face significant challenges due to limited financial resources. Adequate funding is crucial to support a wide range of services and ensure best practices necessary for trafficked children, including safe and appropriate accommodation, trained foster carers, specialised healthcare,



and educational support, including more opportunities for ESOL training. Financial constraints can limit the capacity of local authorities to employ sufficient staff, invest in training programmes, and develop infrastructure that supports comprehensive care.

There is a need for regular and compulsory training for social care, social work, health, education, housing and criminal justice professionals to ensure empathetic and informed practice predominates. Effective management of trafficking cases requires a workforce that is not only sufficient in number but also appropriately trained and specialised with human trafficking embedded into social work, social care, education, law and policing curriculum.

Continual professional development and specialized training are vital for staff working with trafficked children. Training programmes should cover areas such as recognizing signs of trafficking, trauma-informed care, legal rights and protections for victims, professional curiosity and cultural competency. This should include knowledge of the ways in which child-specific forms of human trafficking take place. Enhanced training equips staff with the necessary skills to respond effectively to the diverse and often complex needs of trafficked children.

Adequate physical infrastructure, including safe accommodation, is essential for providing comprehensive support to trafficked children. This infrastructure must be secure, accessible, and equipped to handle the specific needs of these children, including privacy considerations and the capacity to provide intensive support services.

### Service Quality and Availability

The report highlights the need for local authorities to ensure that trafficked children have access to comprehensive support services. These services include safe accommodation, mental health support, and education. Providing such services is essential for the psychological and physical recovery of child victims.

Having a safe home is key to feeling safe for young people. Stable and secure accommodation is a critical factor in the recovery process for trafficked children. The report recommends that local authorities provide safe and appropriate housing options for these children, plus access to good quality foster care placements, protecting them from further exploitation and helping them rebuild their lives.

Being able to trust and feel safe with the professionals supporting them is also important to their sense of safety. Disbelief, distrust and victim-blaming have a significant impact on young people's sense of safety, whereas trauma-informed, relationship-based approaches enhance their sense of safety. Feeling valued and loved in nurturing environments and having a sense of belonging and community are all factors that promote healthy development. Young people need stability and psychological support for their recovery from trafficking in order to find the sense of peace and stability essential for achieving positive outcomes.

### Discriminatory Attitudes and Practices

Young people expressed that structural inequality shapes professional practices and attitudes, and that this creates barriers to achieving positive outcomes. This is consistent with the 'system trauma' identified by Grant et al. (2023) that identified how navigating the asylum system is one of the biggest barriers for young people's ability to recover following experiences of trafficking. In the Creating Stable Futures research, young people highlight not being believed as a key issue permeating their encounters with professionals. Some described issues of overt discrimination, such as being told by a social work manager "why don't you go back to your country?" when they raised complaints about inappropriate accommodation. All young people have the right to fairness and equality of opportunity and outcomes, regardless of their status, and this should be enshrined in all decisions and actions taken with regard to their care. Ensuring empathetic and compassionate practice at all times was highlighted. All unaccompanied children in Scotland should be included in Looked After statistics.

### Lack of Child Rights Based Approaches

Young people going through the asylum and immigration processes feel that their immigration status is the most important issue affecting their lives. Receiving support as they navigate this process was identified as central to their best interests. This means ensuring they have access to high quality legal advice to progress with their claims. Having an independent guardian to support them and advocate for their best interests helps children and young people to feel listened to and heard in the decision-making process. A consistent application of care and after care policy and creating a bridge between child and adult services to allow a proper runway into adulthood is also needed.

Crucially, relationship-based practice was emphasised by young people who feel that having good relationships with professionals who are specialist, trauma-informed and well-trained helps them to feel confident that the people supporting them are acting in their best interests. Outcomes for young people are contingent on work with them being participatory, child-centred, and with a rights and entitlements approach. The voices of children and young people must be present in all Care Planning and Pathway Planning

### Participation

Young people involved in this participatory research wanted their views to be taken seriously. The views of children and young people must be present in all Care Planning and Pathway Planning. The study found few examples of young people's participation in informing practice or policies that directly affected their lives. Investment in facilitating and providing opportunities to enable their meaningful participation is needed. Young people welcomed an approach of working 'with' rather than 'on' or 'for' them.



## Conclusion

The report underscores the need for local authorities to enhance their response to trafficked children by improving identification practices, addressing resource constraints, and ensuring consistent service quality. It calls for better multi-agency coordination and the adoption of child-rights approaches to ensure that trafficked children receive the comprehensive support and protection they need.

## Recommendations

1. The **Scottish Government** 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.
2. The **Scottish Government** should continually challenge punitive national legislation if these impinge on the rights of children and young people in Scotland.
3. The **Scottish Government** 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.
4. The **Scottish Government** must ensure that child victims of trafficking are always treated as children first and afforded their rights to the protection and care they need. Routes to greater participation of young people affected by human trafficking should be developed to inform Scottish legislation, policy and practice.
5. The **Scottish Government** 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.
6. The **Scottish Government** should consider operationalising the Positive Outcomes Framework alongside existing Getting It Right for Every Child and put (GIRFEC) resources and conduct a pilot study to measure the effectiveness of current policies in achieving positive outcomes for identified child victims.
7. **Local authority children's services** with the full support of the Scottish Government must provide quality care for migrant child victims to ensure they are afforded specialist support and the same opportunities as other young people. All unaccompanied children in Scotland should be included in Looked After statistics.
8. The **Scottish Government** should support universities across Scotland to embed human trafficking related topics into their social work, social care, education, law and policing curriculum.
9. **Local authority children's services** must enable psychological and physical wellbeing for child victims, particularly in the provision of safe accommodation and access to mental health services.
10. **Statutory chief officers and safeguarding partners in each local authority area** must ensure they develop relationship-based practice that builds trust with children as fundamental to their ability to have their voices heard and for them to feel safe.
11. All professionals working with children and young people who have been identified as trafficked must ensure a positive non-discriminatory practice and use non-discriminatory and non-stigmatising language when working with them.

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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