

## Human Trafficking

The phenomenon of human trafficking, although subject to much debate and critique, is often portrayed as the fastest growing illegal and profitable activity in the world (Morris 2019). Globally, over 40,000,000 people are estimated to be victims of modern slavery and human trafficking across and within borders (International Labour Organisation, ILO 2017). Children are thought to account for between a quarter (ILO 2017) and a third of victims (United Nations Office Drugs and Crime, UNODC 2018). However, estimating the numbers of victims is at best good guesswork, based largely on unverified information, with no baseline data. This task is made more difficult by the definitional problems associated with trafficking and the various assumptions and claims made about both victims and perpetrators (Godziak 2016; Spencer and Broad 2012; Goodey 2008; O'Connell Davidson 2013; Weitzer 2013; 2014).

Article 4 of the Council of Europe (2005) define trafficking in human beings as:

.... the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the 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 of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.

Article 4 also includes other provisions to ensure that consent of a victim is irrelevant (section 2) and that for children (any person under 18 years of age) the means (coercion, threat etc) are not required to be present (section 3). This takes into account the various methods by which a child can be manipulated into an exploitative situation.

Despite recognised international definitions, policies and practice have often developed following a political agenda, with trafficking being sensationalised, misrepresented and politicised (Koser 2000; Brennan 2005), as “*anecdotal evidence*

*and moral ideologies*” replace any empirical data (Musto 2009:282). Sharapov (2017) believes there is often an unhealthy focus on trafficking because of the way it is framed under various discourses and perspectives - criminal justice, immigration, or human rights – as each compete for prominence. This confusion in policy, practice and conceptualisation reflects the complexities of exploitation and helps to frame how governments can problematise trafficking. Within this confused landscape Yea (2017: 2) argues that the evidence for, and understanding of, trafficking and how to respond *“should never be thought of as politically neutral...truths are social, political and moral constructs”*.

Notwithstanding these concerns, there has been considerable effort in the UK to identify, quantify and respond to human trafficking. Official estimates about the extent of the problem have, since 2009, been based around the number of people referred to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM). The NRM is the UK policy and practice framework for identifying and referring potential victims of human trafficking and modern slavery to appropriate support. Since its introduction over 25,000 people have been referred into the NRM, although these official statistics are not considered accurate as not all victims of trafficking are identified as such, nor are all potential victims referred (Anti-Trafficking Monitoring Group, ATMG 2014).

There has also been substantial criticism of the implementation of the NRM since its inception, not least that it is overly bureaucratic and too closely aligned with immigration processes, and asylum decision-making (Annison 2013; Setter and Baker 2018). In response to criticism, the Home Office (2014) undertook a review of the referral system in order to address some of the concerns. Following an evaluation of a number of pilot areas (Home Office 2017) which demonstrated improvements in decision-making and time taken to make a decision, changes were made to the NRM in April 2019. Referrals are now made by ‘first responders’ (those agencies that can make a referral), via a simplified digital referral, to single ‘competent authorities’ (decision makers), located in the Home Office, who make the final judgement on whether a person is considered a potential victim of trafficking or not.

This paper provides an important theoretical, critical and practical contribution to the UK process for identifying unaccompanied children who have been exploited through

trafficking. It does so at a time when policy has recently changed and the numbers identified through the official NRM referral system continue to rise. The paper has emerged from practice, policy and research experience over the last twenty years, and a growing concern at the impact of institutional and procedural factors on the social work role. It has wider resonance in terms of conceptualising both the underpinning factors and the responses to child trafficking through a broader political priority of 'neoliberal governmentality'. Much has been written about the flawed process of initial identification of child victims in an immigration/criminal justice framework, as the responses of child protection professionals are both marginalised and criticised (Setter and Baker 2018; Ishola 2011; Sereni and Baker 2018). We argue that these processes of overlooking and criticising the safeguarding experts is the result of neoliberal governmentality and the problematising of modern slavery and human trafficking as one of immigration and crime control.

While this paper focuses on the UK wide NRM policy, there are different systems in place to support victims of human trafficking in the devolved administrations. The specific responses are governed by different trafficking legislation; the Modern Slavery Act (2015) in England and Wales, the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Scotland) Act (2015), and the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Act (Northern Ireland) 2015. An unaccompanied asylum-seeking child (UASC) is defined by the Home Office (2018a) as a person under 18 years old with no relatives or guardian in the UK who is applying for asylum in their own right. While this is the group of children and young people we are discussing, the more politically neutral terms unaccompanied children and young people are used throughout this paper. The terms child safeguarding and protection are also used interchangeably to reflect different policy and practice across the UK. Terminology is important when discussing the responses to child trafficking and it can determine how the issues are framed and responded to.

### **Neoliberalism and human trafficking**

Neoliberalism is a contested concept, not easy to define, that generates much debate and argument in the international public sphere (Eagleton-Pierce 2016). Harvey (2007) suggests that it has become such an overriding doctrine that it affects the way we interpret and understand the world. He notes that while there are often differing

understandings of its meaning and origin it is usually associated with a political and economic theory that proposes economic development and human well-being promoted by increased free markets and free trade. While there has been discussion of the economic costs and benefits of neoliberalism (Duménil and Lévy 2010), its negative effects on human rights and the labour market (Harvey 2007, 2010; George 2000) and the relationship between neoliberal policies and human trafficking and exploitation (Peksen et al 2017) have also been highlighted.

Social inequalities have increased dramatically since the development of a globalised, neoliberal ideology (Hill and Kumar 2009), and the resulting impact of globalisation, including international features of exploitation, have emerged to such an extent that the trafficking discourse is now conflated with the complex area of migration as people move across borders to seek improved social and economic circumstances (Howard 2017). This is despite evidence that most victims of trafficking and exploitation are identified in their country of origin (UNODC 2018). In this respect, globalisation and neoliberalism are inextricably linked and create markets that ensure vulnerability to exploitation (Kotz; Peksen et al 2017), where vulnerable people may become victims of human trafficking - the 'collateral damage' (Bauman 2011) of the social inequalities created by the drive for increased economic benefits.

In the UK discussion has also developed in the context of an increasingly hostile environment for migrants (Hek 2005), and debates around Brexit have further polarised immigration discourse. These discussions have been described as a crisis of both migration and neoliberalism (Mulvey and Davidson 2018). This resonates with wider concerns that neoliberal policies generate anti-migrant attitudes (Akira and Yoshikuni 2019). Such concerns often result in immigration policies that have particular impact on social work and child protection practice, as immigration law is often prioritised (Ramsay 2020; Shall 2018).

While neoliberalism has been identified as a driver of the exploitation of people through the continual impact of globalised profit-making, it has also been identified as a crucial approach to determining how states identify and work with victims. A key aspect of corporate governance and neoliberal practice involves expert partnerships coming together to address pressing social issues through centralisation of policy and agreed

aims and objectives. Central government defines priorities, creates and maintains the framework, but is not directly responsible for delivering support, instead placing the responsibility for co-ordinating responses outside its explicit remit (Ling 2000; Pratt 1989; Harvey 2007). Under neoliberal orthodoxy, as state provision for many areas of social policy declines, delivery of services is provided by NGOs and the third sector (Hyslop 2018; Webb 2006; Culpitt 1998; Spolander et al 2014). Gadd and Broad (2018) identify that in the UK there are over 70 independent NGO's working in the area of human trafficking, and many of these have developed 'expertise' to provide training and awareness-raising to a range of professionals (Van Dyke 2017). Garret's (2009: 9) characterisation of neoliberalism as helping to create a hegemonic 'coalition of the willing' is reflected in the numbers of agencies working in the 'rescue industry' (Connelly 2015).

*"Procedures, performance indicators and eligibility criteria"* (Rogowski 2011:162) are the hallmark of neoliberal governance and in relation to human trafficking the NRM is the most visible example of this. Through the NRM the government retains control and access to services and ensures that while identification of trafficking victims is determined by the 'gatekeepers' (single competent authorities), these decision makers for eligibility of welfare services are not responsible for the delivery of support to victims. The NRM itself (procedures), the timeframes for submission and responses (performance measurements) and the indicators of (child) trafficking (eligibility to be identified as a victim) encapsulate neoliberal practice, and represent an attempt to reduce the complexities of human trafficking to a more easily administered bureaucratic process. For children, delivery of services has been devolved to a local authority level, and for Scotland and Northern Ireland this 'fragmentation of responsibility' (Raine and Wilson 1997) is even more stark as the identification of victims remains centralised within the Home Office, while delivery of support services is governed by devolved legislation (both for trafficking and child welfare responsibilities).

Within responses to trafficking in the UK the complex relationships between movement, migration, exploited people and those who facilitate movement and exploitation (Spencer and Broad 2012) have been reduced to simple and realisable policy goals that hide the structural and causal factors of exploitation and trafficking

(Arocha 2013; Andrijasevic and Mai 2016). As Davies (2010) suggests, in time of uncertainty and unknown risks the neoliberal approach ignores complexities, reduces ambiguity and introduces performance evaluation to manage perceived problem issues. This reductionism, or severing from social reality (Bourdieu 1998), is a hallmark of classic neoliberal social policy - in trafficking multifaceted issues are now reduced to simple categories of individuals (good and bad, victims and perpetrators) and (expert) responses with little reference to broader socio-economic conditions.

The government, through the NRM and related strategy and guidance, has framed the problem largely as one of immigration and criminal justice; has directed the policy and practice (Broad and Turnbull 2018) and defined who is a victim and 'deserves' support, while at the same time outsourcing the delivery of services. Garrett (2019) identifies this contradictory role of government as being one of the paradoxes of neoliberalism where the rhetoric often suggests less government involvement (at the point of support and service delivery with trafficking), while in practice there is often more involvement at the policing and surveillance level (see also Garland 2012).

### **Child Trafficking**

Responses to the trafficking and exploitation of children is also an area that has been characterised by neoliberal influence. As indicated above, children account for a third to half of all identified trafficking victims identified globally. In the UK the numbers of children referred to the NRM has risen annually since 2009 and, over the last two years, the numbers have increased substantially from 2,118 in 2017 to 3,071 in 2018 (NCA 2019). Much of this increase relates to referrals of UK national children, largely the result of identifying child sexual exploitation, 'county lines' and child criminal exploitation concerns (Home Office 2018b). Notwithstanding the official referral statistics, and with little doubt that children are moved to the UK and exploited, there remains substantial debate regarding the extent of child trafficking into the UK (Westwood 2016). While this paper focuses specifically on unaccompanied non-UK national children, many of the concerns about the response to victims of trafficking also relate to other groups of children and young people.

Child trafficking is recognised internationally as constituting child abuse and in recognition of the particular vulnerabilities of children, including issues of consent and

agency (see Gozdziaik 2016), state parties are obliged to ensure that there are specific provisions in place for the assessment and support of children (see EU Parliament 2011). Yet despite calls not to treat child trafficking as merely a sub-category of human trafficking (ECPAT 2010; Wallace and Wylie 2011), the response, also via the NRM, locates responsibility for the identification of abused and exploited children who arrive in the country with border control (and initially criminal justice) agencies (ATMG 2010; Sereni and Baker 2018). This ignores the acknowledgment made prior to the introduction of the NRM that identification and support was within the remit of local authority social work services and partner agencies (Rigby and Ishola 2016). In effect, the identification decision-making process marginalises social workers, and other children's services professionals, and their involvement remains a largely paper based exercise (Ishola 2011). The NRM process for children involves completion of a child specific NRM referral form by the first responder, which is then sent to the single competent authority to make a decision; this may, or may not, involve further discussion with children's services, and almost certainly does not involve meeting with the child or young person. Unlike adults, children do not have to consent to a referral.

Since its introduction the relevance and appropriateness of the NRM for child victims has consistently been questioned (ATMG 2010; London SCB 2011). In effect, what would in any other manifestation be a social work task - the identification and support of abused and exploited children - rests on the decisions of newly created (in 2009) partnerships for identifying suspected trafficking victims. As Harvey et al (2015) highlight, the single competent authorities are considered the leads and experts on child trafficking. This label of 'expertise' has probably emerged because the competent authorities were given the remit for identification when the NRM was first developed.

The focus on specific routes to identification by 'trafficking experts', serves to maintain a focus on unaccompanied children's differences as migrants, rather than their potential needs as children. This helps to constitute a process of 'othering' (Masocha 2015; Staerklé 2013) in both policy and practice as "*stereotypical trafficking representations*" (Andrijasevic, and Mai 2016: 3) assume a collective identity for trafficked children and contribute to a focus on movement (migration) as the locus of exploitation and abuse for children. These assumptions often mean that the movement of children automatically indicates 'risk' and possible exploitation, while ignoring the

agency of children in decisions to move, and overlooks the reality that trafficking is likely to be only one type of abuse along a continuum of exploitation or risk (Howard 2017; Sharapov 2017; Van Dyke 2017).

### **Neoliberal policy and practice criticism**

Practice and policy responses to the exploitation of unaccompanied children have striking similarities to neoliberal orthodoxies identified elsewhere in relation to child safeguarding and protection. Neoliberalism has been linked to increased bureaucracy, managerial techniques and close monitoring in the welfare state, impacting on some of the most vulnerable people (Stark 2017; Knox Haly 2010; Parton 2014; Rogowski 2015; Spolander et al 2014; Garrett 2009; 2019). It has resulted in increased criticism of, and challenges to, welfare provision, with blame for any failures attributed to professions and individuals, rather than systemic shortcomings (Stark 2017; Aronson and Hemingway 2011; Jonsson 2019).

With public service cuts and the austerity agenda viewed as part of neoliberal policy there is evidence of particular negative impacts on children resulting from the reduction of resources to children and families social work (Singh and Cowden 2015; Rogowski 2015). This has been accompanied by an increase in managerial systems for child protection (Knox-Haly 2010) and, as public sector social workers are continually criticised for not being good enough (Gwilym 2018), there is also increased provision of services by the third sector in child safeguarding (Rogowski 2018). Additionally, social work practitioners have become more embroiled in administrative risk assessments in order to ration resources, thus deflecting attention from the broader structural factors that underpin the circumstances they are required to address (Rogowski 2018).

While there have been criticisms of the NRM as a system for identification of children there has been corresponding, and specific, criticism of the failure of social work and children's services to identify and respond appropriately (Hynes 2010; Pearce 2011; Howard 2017; ECPAT 2009; ATMG 2014; Harvey et al 2015; West 2016), not least because child trafficking is viewed as a particularly complex process (Gozdziaik and MacDonnell 2007; Harvey et al 2015). Social workers have also been criticised for mirroring the role of the Home Office and immigration officials in relation to children on



the move (Humphries 2004). Perhaps, as Rogowski (2018:18) has also argued for other child protection priorities, it is a position they have been forced into because of the neoliberal world of austerity and scarce resources where their role is reduced to *“merely intrusively asking questions, gathering information and.....inspecting..... lifestyles.”*

Reliance on the technical application of assessment instruments (NRM form and child trafficking matrix which provides the ‘indicators’ of trafficking) may also erode the wider social work task and role of raising a critical awareness of abuse and exploitation (Hyslop 2016). For children exploited through trafficking this involves their categorisation as ‘trafficked children’ rather than as children with a range of risks and needs, one of which may be exploitation and abuse through trafficking. Cree et al (2014) also suggest that this focus on trafficking (however it is variously defined), diverts attention away from broader child welfare, support and protection issues, or social justice and human rights abuses.

In reality, the governmentality of responses to the trafficking of unaccompanied children also appears to be based upon a neoliberal approach. While such a neoliberal analysis has been discussed elsewhere for both child exploitation and trafficking, the link with similar developments within child welfare and safeguarding provides an opportunity here to consider a (not so) radical change that goes far beyond recent reforms of the NRM. A new practice model would ensure that children are not ‘othered’ by having their identification as victims of child abuse determined by a different agency and process than all other victims of child abuse across the UK.

### **What should it look like?**

While we have argued that decisions to bypass the existing child safeguarding and protection structures in the identification of child victims of trafficking can be located in a wider neoliberal agenda, we are also conscious that if not the present NRM system - what? Solutions to this question lie not only in policy and practice responses but also in the broader understanding of the extent of the issues, the contributory factors and, notwithstanding some of the concerns about the concept (see McLaughlin 2017), a child first, migrant second approach (Crawley 2006).

The UK has well-established child protection and safeguarding processes which, while not always working well, are recognised as a relative success story (Rogowski 2014; Pritchard and Williams 2010). While 'child protection' has often focused on particular issues or on specific groups of children (FRA 2019), recent practice and policy developments in the UK has broadened understanding and definitions of child abuse to include abuse outside the 'family' home (Malloch and Rigby 2020). Concerns around child trafficking broaden definitions and understanding of exploitation and abuse, with the additional challenges for policy makers and child protection practitioners (Lonne et al 2008), but continuing with the identification of exploited children outside the existing child protection system is difficult to justify and arguably does not adequately provide an integrated child protection system which places the child at the centre and ensures that all essential services work together to protect the child (FRA 2019; UNICEF 2015). It is this principle of an integrated system, coupled with the wider internationally recognised remit of social workers to adopt a rights based, social justice approach, that informs a proposed practice model that places both social workers and children at the centre of the identification and decision making process.

In England and Wales, it has been suggested that the identification of trafficked children would better fit with the child protection system if children were referred simultaneously to multi-agency safeguarding hubs for a determination of their trafficking status, and the local authority child protection systems for care and protection issues (ATMG 2014). The ATMG argued this would ensure their wider risk and needs would also be addressed, even if there was a negative decision from the competent authority, although Murie and Owens (2016) suggest this may not always happen as the child protection decision can be overruled. ECAPT UK (2017) and Sereni and Baker (2018) developed the ATMG model further, suggesting that any reforms should ensure that government departments with responsibility for children lead on the issue.

In Scotland there have been calls for the elimination of a separate competent authority identification system for children exploited through trafficking and instead, to refer all concerns via the existing child protection system. A multi-agency case conference could then make an initial determination and identification of trafficking as a concern,

and refer to the NRM (Rigby and Ishola 2016). In effect, the identification, assessment and follow on support and monitoring would be managed in one child protection system, albeit mitigated through a referral to the existing NRM and competent authorities.

Across the UK, UNICEF (2015) identified that the immigration and child protection systems ran on parallel lines in relation to unaccompanied children, with workers waiting for trafficking decisions before assessing and addressing protection needs. UNICEF called on the UK government to ensure that child trafficking was addressed as a child protection issue and that the NRM worked more efficiently to recognise child victims, with the best interests of the child being the primary concern.

These suggestions do not go far enough. We now argue that for both a practice and rights based perspective in the best interests of children, the identification, assessment and support of children exploited through trafficking rests wholly within the existing child safeguarding and protection framework, managed by social workers, with the support of partner agencies. The Home Office should have no responsibility for deciding if a child is a victim of exploitation. The wholesale shifting of responsibility to those child safeguarding and protection agencies whose primary role is child welfare would address the issue of fragmentation of response and assuage concerns about new expert partnerships solely for trafficking that exist outside the child protection system. Such an approach would provide for a more child focussed 'durable solution' that addresses all protection needs and takes into account the child's views (UNICEF 2015).

The recent changes to the system for identifying all victims of trafficking, which also introduces a multi-agency backstop, do not address the fundamental concern that children exploited through trafficking are identified through a paper (digital) based system, that sits outside traditional child safeguarding frameworks. These recent changes merely maintain the neoliberal governance, where central government hold onto the strategy, policy and decision making, while devolving delivery and support to localities.

In the context of the continuing challenges faced by the NRM pilots (Home Office 2017) our proposed model would facilitate child welfare decision-making and provision of services being managed within one child protection system. One of the challenges faced by the new decision makers in the pilot areas related to gathering information, and waiting for police and immigration interviews to be completed before trafficking decisions were made (Home Office 2017). If the decision-making was undertaken by a multi-agency child protection / safeguarding conference, in line with various UK child protection guidance, joint social work and police interviews would be part of this process and additional interviews and processes would not be required to determine if a child has been trafficked, or requires additional support to address risk and needs. It would all be part of the same process.

The Home Office (2017) also identified the separation of case-working and decision-making as an issue. This is mitigated in our child protection case conference model as social workers, and other partners (most notably independent child trafficking guardians, see Crawley and Kohli 2013; Kohli et al 2015), already working with the child will be involved directly at the meetings making the trafficking determination. Decision-making at child protection case conferences would also allow for the possibility for children and young people to be present, if safe and appropriate, centring the voice of the child in the system and further meeting international good practice regarding an 'integrated child protection system' (FRA 2019) for all children. Resourcing as an issue (Home Office 2017) is also addressed as case conferences meet anyway whenever there are child protection concerns.

In terms of obligations to international conventions requiring state parties to identify victims of trafficking, it is the identification and appropriate support that is important, not a specific, rigid, National Referral Mechanism. Indeed the original OSCE (2014) model for a NRM envisaged a cooperative framework, involving state actors and civil society to identify victims. More recently, the European Commission (2018) defined NRM as a 'mechanism aimed at identifying, protecting and assisting victims of trafficking in human beings, through referral, and involving relevant public authorities and civil society'. The mechanism has existed in the UK for many years in the form of a child protection case conference.

For the social work profession, the contributory factors and broader structural understanding required as part of an assessment process (Rigby and Whyte 2015), will also engage the wider priorities of social workers in relation to human rights and social justice (IFSW 2014; Singh 2015). Rogowski (2014) has argued that social workers need to take a more critical stance in relation to their work with victims of abuse and exploitation, locating victimisation in the broader socio-economic conditions that lead to and permit exploitation. This is perhaps even more crucial in the context of the lives of separated children. These circumstances can lead to a range of quite exceptional needs, which require *“meaningful assessments...facilitated by professionals who are appropriately skilled, committed to basic social work principles, and able to draw on knowledge that will assist them and the children and young people”* (Mitchell 2007: 59). Comprehensive assessments, involving children, and encompassing all aspects of their lives and experiences, incorporates a rights based approach and ensures Rogowski’s critical stance.

Such an approach is not without potential problems given the preceding discussion regarding criticism of local authority responses. It would require increased training for child protection professionals to overcome the concerns about lack of awareness of trafficking and its indicators (West 2017; ATMG 2014; Harvey et al 2015) and to ensure unaccompanied children and young people are not lost amongst all the other complex child protection cases (Gozdziak and MacDonnell 2007). Additionally, clearer links between agencies present at cases conferences and other aspects of the justice and immigration systems would need to be established, although there is precedence for Home Office officials attending child protection case conference (see Murie and Owens 2016). There would also need to be consideration given to accessing criminal injuries compensation following a decision by a child protection case conference, in the absence of any criminal action against the traffickers. This liaison between these different parts of the system could retain the name ‘NRM’ if required.

## **Conclusion**

There has been much written about problems with the identification of children who have been exploited through trafficking; and neoliberal influences on trafficking and children and families social work practice. However, this is the first time a critique of the response to trafficking for unaccompanied children in the UK has looked more

broadly at fundamental conceptual and practice issues in the context of a neoliberal orthodoxy. Responses to unaccompanied asylum seeking children in the UK who have been exploited through trafficking have not occurred by accident, but as part of a continuing neoliberal governance that has impacted on other aspects of the UK's child protection systems and understanding of human trafficking globally. While child trafficking widens the definition of child abuse, and brings additional challenges, it is essentially a child safeguarding issue. Social workers and children's services professionals should be tasked both with its identification and support.

A neoliberal approach in children and families social work has ensured that the responses to child abuse are no longer a medico-social problem with social workers as lead professionals, but a criminal justice concern with a shift towards identification, information gathering and conviction, rather than direct work with, and support, for children (Rogowski 2018). This is reflected in the response to child trafficking where social workers are not the lead professionals. The NRM and the competent authorities became the new partnerships, relying on the completion of referral forms to gather the information and assist with decision-making, without any direct work with children. It was perhaps inevitable that criticism of social workers and other child protection professionals would follow when those professionals, whose primary role is safeguarding vulnerable children, are marginalised in the identification and decision making processes. Arguably, the lack of training and awareness for child protection professionals was also a consequence of the decision to locate trafficking expertise and the job of identification with 'expert' competent authorities (Harvey et al 2015). It is a paradox of practice in this area of child safeguarding that the identification of children at risk, or abused, through trafficking has been taken away from those agencies who work directly with children and whose primary expertise is child safeguarding and protection, while at the same time, these agencies are criticised for not identifying children who have been victims of trafficking. Questioning the competence of social work and other children's services to identify and support all children in need has maintained a policy and practice distinction between unaccompanied children who have been trafficked and UK born children experiencing other types of exploitation.

While not ignoring or diminishing the complex arguments that surround the issue of exploitation and trafficking, nor the criticism that has been levelled at children's services responses, it makes no sense to further alienate and 'other' migrant children. The present NRM process involves continuing to subject them to an overly bureaucratic, method of questioning and identification that lies primarily within a border control system. The Home Office is under statutory obligation to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in discharging its duties under Section 55 of the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009, and considerable efforts have been made to comply with this requirement. However, there can be no doubt those child protection authorities whose primary duty is the protection of children, and who have the experience, training and expertise required to identify and provide care to exploited children, are in a better position to ensure that identification and subsequent interventions are child centred and in a child's best interest. As such, and as a first move to de-politicise the responses to child trafficking, the present decision-making process located in the Home Office, should be transferred fully to the 'experts' in child safeguarding and protection.

However, it is also recognised that responses to asylum seekers is not entirely unproblematic among the social work profession (Masocha 2015). Whether a new practice model mitigates against the 'othering' of child migrants, and criticism of social workers, remains to be seen, but it may help to develop a 'child first, migrant second' thinking and response in the UK (Crawley 2006). Ultimately, "child trafficking needs to be recognised as a highly complex area of child protection" (Ishola 2011: 99) and the marginalisation of children's services professionals needs to end. Any changes will require careful monitoring going forward - the emerging independent child trafficking guardians will be key partners for local authority social workers over the next few years - and training and awareness raising amongst child safeguarding professionals would require attention to ensure victims of trafficking do not fall through the net.

As the numbers of children from the UK and abroad identified as victims of trafficking continues to rise now is the time to ensure that child safeguarding professionals take centre stage in their identification and support, so that all children who are exploited and abused receive the same response. Conceptually, such an approach would ensure that concerns about migration, border security and associated risks would be

a secondary concern to the immediate needs and safety of a child. If the route into a system of support and protection remains in a centralised, immigration led identification route, unaccompanied children will continue to be labelled as different and subsequent responses mitigated through disparate systems.

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