

# Prevention of child trafficking and exploitation

A synthesis of Modern Slavery and  
Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre  
funded research on child trafficking  
and child exploitation (2020-24)

**Report 3: Cross-cutting themes and recommendations**

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# Introduction

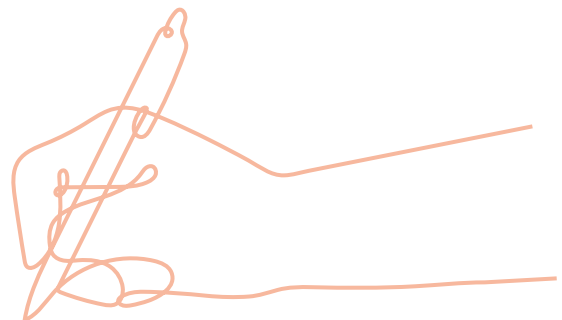
This report is the **third of three reports** which, combined, along with a **Research Summary**, provide an evidence synthesis of the Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre's (PEC) funded research portfolio on child modern slavery from Phase 1 (2020-24).

**Modern Slavery and Human Rights PEC** was created to improve understanding of modern slavery and to transform the effectiveness of laws and policies to address it. It has funded research across four priority areas: preventing modern slavery, survivor needs and enhancing victim support, modern slavery in business supply chains and the effectiveness of legal enforcement measures, as well as a responsive area focused on Covid-19.

Whilst a dedicated focus on children is not one of these priorities, all have relevance, to different degrees, to children. In addition, seven of the published 47 research projects funded by Modern Slavery and Human Rights PEC in Phase 1 are wholly focused on children.

These seven research projects include:

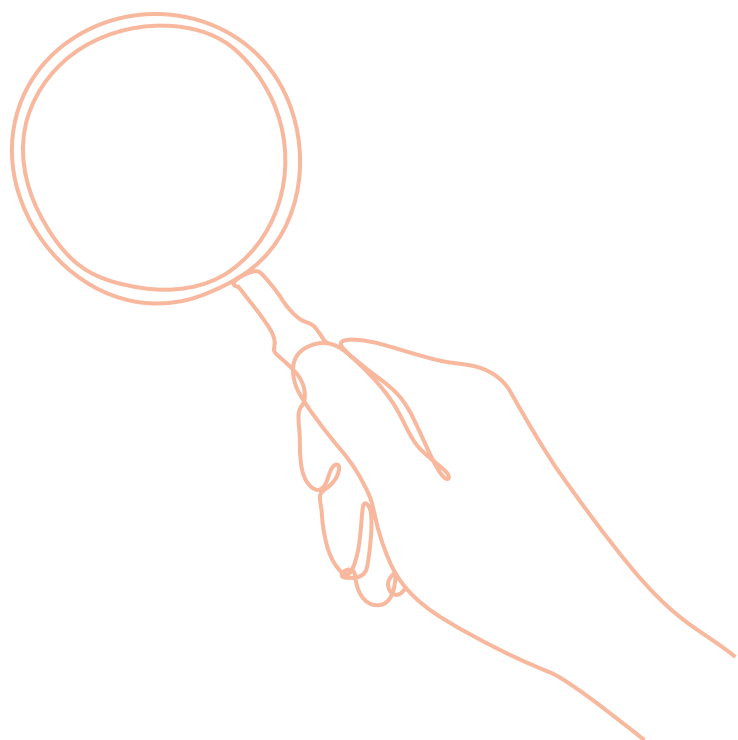
1. A desk-based review of child exploitation prevention measures (Celiksoy et al, 2024)
2. Children's experiences of the Scottish Guardianship Service (Grant et al, 2024)
3. An evaluation of the Independent Child Trafficking Guardianship (ICTG) service in England and Wales (Skeels et al, 2024)
4. Creating a positive outcomes framework for children (Hynes et al, 2022)
5. A trial of open conversations as a prevention measure for children with SEND in education (Franklin et al, 2024)
6. Intersections between safeguarding policies and modern slavery for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) (Franklin et al, 2024)
7. An exploration of risks for children in Home Office operated hotels (Ayeb-Karlsson et al, 2024).



The purpose of the evidence synthesis is to draw together learning on how the seven funded child-focused studies connect, both explicitly and implicitly, on a range of topics, as well as on the approaches taken to research and knowledge production. This includes exploring how data might be combined in new and innovative ways.

Modern Slavery and Human Rights PEC will use this work to draw links between its funded research projects, furthering its objectives on making these more than the sum of their parts. The hope is also that this synthesis will help to identify common areas of evidence, gaps for further exploration and research for the next phase and recommendations that Modern Slavery and Human Rights PEC can feed into its policy-focused work.

This report (Report 3: Cross-cutting themes and recommendations) focuses on **a synthesis of evidence from across the reports by cross-cutting themes, as well as an analysis of the reports' recommendations combined.**



# What cross-cutting themes can be applied to the research?

Cross-cutting themes have been drawn inductively from Modern Slavery PEC's funded research on children (for example, participation and being heard) and, where relevant, by connecting to cross-cutting topics from Modern Slavery PEC's adult-focused portfolio (for example, mental health and cultural competence). Through approaching the child-focused research in this way, distinct 'bodies' of evidence are revealed. Connections between evidence under cross-cutting themes with Such and Aminu et al's (2022) 'continuum' of four prevention stages from preventing exploitation 'Before it happens', to 'intervening Early to prevent further harm', to 'Treating harms' and 'preventing Re-trafficking' (see Report 2: BETR Prevention Continuum), as well as their five 'prevention pathways', are also highlighted. It is important to note that this continuum is based on analysis of studies preventing adult sexual and labour exploitation.

## Participation and positive outcomes

'Being heard' relates to 'prevention pathways' (Such and Aminu et al, 2022) that enable children at risk of or affected by modern slavery to 'access' their rights, including their right to participation, and to build their agency, 'power and control' in and over their own lives.

Evidence from the portfolio indicates, however, a lack of opportunities for children at risk of exploitation to voice their experiences and concerns or be heard before any harm occurs and at the early stages of exploitation. Guardianship support services for children and young people affected by human trafficking are, however, demonstrated as participatory. Co-developed guidance with children in an education setting of what might work to open conversations around the prevention of exploitation is promising (Franklin et al, 2024).

In relation to children and young people affected by human trafficking, Hynes states that: **'We have the frameworks and the means to listen to young people and it is critical that their right to be heard and their right to participate are upheld.'** (2022:8)

Participation here broadly reflects the interpretation of Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) with a focus on how best to ensure young people's views are given a meaningful space in their interactions with professionals and systems. One of the four sections of Hynes' (2022) Positive Outcomes Framework co-developed with young survivors of human trafficking relates to participation and the right to be heard.

From the Modern Slavery and Human Rights PEC funded research portfolio, Celiksoy (2024), Hynes (2022), Franklin (2024a, 2024b) and Ayeb-Karlsson (2024) combined tell a story of a lack of participation of children and young people at risk of and affected by modern slavery in matters affecting them in their daily lives. For example, Jones et al 2017 in Franklin (2024b) state disabled children and young people who had experienced child abuse 'struggled to be heard, be believed, be taken seriously when disclosing' and links this with the lack of understanding and recognition of indicators of exploitation amongst children with SEND. Hynes states that the voices of children and young people with lived experience of human trafficking are missing from debates in the UK and their opinions rarely taken into account (2022:1) leading to practice and policies that are less relevant and effective for them.

Skeels (2024) and Grant (2023) document the participatory nature of support services for children and young people with lived experience of human trafficking. Grant (2023) records how young people supported by the Scottish Guardianship Service described positive experiences in general with their guardian or social worker where they felt they had been listened to and had their views taken into account. For the young people engaged by Grant, recovery was 'being able and feeling confident to make and voice choices' (2023:28). Professionals' capacity to listen and be caring enough to listen was important:

*'They normally talk to me, they asked how I was, how my life was, whether my mood was okay, my mental health was okay, if I needed any help at all. They taught me how to deal with things, how to do things better.'*

Interview 5, young person: Grant, 2023:25

Skeels (2024) identifies a core component of ICTG service support which creates opportunities for children and young people to participate in matters that are important to them:

*'From a rights-based perspective, the fact that these young people were, in the main, clearly able to talk to and share their wishes and views with their support workers, reflects both their agency and active participation in their own protection. It also positions participation as an instrumental right through which all other rights can be fulfilled, with young people's support workers as conduits or vehicles enabling this.'*

Skeels, 2024:45

Franklin (2024a) is concerned with the conditions that might facilitate 'open conversations' on child modern slavery between children and staff in schools before harm occurs. Children want teachers and others to have the 'ability to notice, listen, relate and facilitate' and to 'hear what's being said' (Franklin, 2024a:5). The indication is, as with the quotation from Skeels (2024) above and referred to in Hynes (2022), that participation is fundamental to children's protection:

*'The ability to notice, listen, relate and facilitate an air of comfort that normalises and makes it alright to talk and broach difficult subjects, or even just talk or share basic feelings, or a basic 'hello' in a relaxed way sits at the heart of holistic safeguarding.'*

Franklin, 2024a:5

Grant (2023), Skeels (2024) and Hynes (2022) support children and young people affected by modern slavery to explore what support needs, recovery and associated outcomes mean for them and their lives. The overarching aim for Hynes is:

*'...to understand what positive outcomes might look like from the perspective of young people subjected to human trafficking modern slavery and/or human trafficking and what pathways towards these positive outcomes might look like in practice'*

2022:3

## Relationships and a 'trusted adult'

A trusted adult relationship does not feature in Such and Aminu et al's (2022) study as a 'prevention pathway'. The research portfolio analysed here, however, evidences its unique importance for children, for the prevention of exploitation and re-exploitation and support for their recovery.

Children and young people identified at risk of or subject to exploitation are in contact with a range of adults in their lives: their friends/peers (if 18 or over), 'staff' – what Franklin calls 'an array of professionals and practitioners, both statutory and non-statutory' including teachers, youth workers, social workers (2024a:3) – and other adults including their parents/carers and other acquaintances. Hynes (2022), in relation to non-UK born young people migrating to the UK, mentions their relationships with guardians, solicitors, their families/foster parents/carers, the police, interpreters and other professionals. Adults

can also, of course, notes Franklin (2024a), include 'perpetrators and predators' (2024:3). These relationships are complex, dynamic, can be harmful and/or protective in different ways at different times and can intersect.

The importance of trusted, healthy relationships with adults is highlighted as a protective factor across most of the funded child-focused research in relation to the prevention of exploitation and/or re-exploitation of children and support for their recovery (all except Franklin, 2024b). Franklin (2024a) notes the importance of such relationship-based practice which includes a form of 'relational safety'. For Hynes:

*'...work with young people rests on a fulcrum of trust [my emphasis] between those in receipt of services and those delivering them as a key component of any successful support...'*

2022:40

For Celiksoy, a lack of trust acts as a barrier to early identification of risk or exploitation but can be understood due to a lack of trust in officials and the fear of not being believed or facing repercussions:

*'...there is not enough work done to build relationships and trust with those from minoritised communities, whether that be refugee and migrant young people, whether it be the black community, whether it be all kinds of communities that exist in the UK, there is a need to be proactive and make efforts to build trust.'*

(Interview #3) 2024:33

Ayeb-Karlsson (2024) narrates the importance of trust for protection and the inability of children to build trust with staff in adult Home Office hotels.

The role of and need for an identified, independent, and specific 'trusted adult' for a child at risk of, or who has been subject to, exploitation is also highlighted and stands out from the research. This is someone concerned with the best interests of the child or young person, there to provide support and to advocate for what they are entitled to and need.

This role is, of course, the remit or mandate of the statutory independent 'guardians' that are assigned to certain children and young people who have been affected by human trafficking as part of the ICTG and SGS services in England, Wales, and Scotland, as set out in Grant (2023) and Skeels (2024). Skeels (2024) sets out the qualities considered essential for such a role and the process

through which trust with children and young people is built. Skeels (2024) finds that these guardians are 'trusted adults' for children and young people who consider them instrumental to their participation, protection, and achievement of positive outcomes. Grant, in relation to the SGS, finds that 'young people and professionals were united in the view that good practice was contingent upon the formation of trusting relationships', and that trust was 'overwhelmingly highlighted as a vital ingredient, even condition, to providing effective support' (2023:24). Hynes finds that young people with independent guardians 'felt listened to and heard, facilitating better child protection' (2022:5) and reports on the importance of trust for such relationships and the damage caused by mistrust and disbelief. According to the young people engaged in Hynes' study, trusting relationships required child-friendly, compassionate, and responsive ways of working.

For Franklin (2024a) in education and other contexts, there is the potential for children to identify and select which adult might play this important role, where the characteristics and qualities considered essential are in place and supported by the structures, systems and cultures around them. However, she finds that there is a lack of evidence about how children with SEND specifically build trust, approach, and respond to practitioners and professionals at risk of or experiencing exploitation and how best to build such trusted relationships with adults for them. Franklin (2024a) sets out to address this gap and asks both practitioners and young people: 'what makes a trusted adult?'

Franklin notes that for young people with SEND engaged in the research '***it was not necessarily a particular role...but rather personal qualities, understanding, trust and approach***' that mattered (2024a:22). Adults needed to know the child well enough and be observant enough to recognise subtle changes in their behaviour. Young people wanted adults to not wait for them to disclose but to be proactive and interested, to approach them, ask questions, be curious and notice changed behaviour. Consistently children and young people shared that such 'changes in behaviour' should be seen as 'red flags', a form of communication, and a 'cry for help' (Franklin, 2024a:9).

This notion of an important and meaningful relationship with an independent 'trusted adult' for a potentially vulnerable child or young person, the benefits and impact on their well-being and lives, finds traction and can be situated within the broader literature on vulnerable children and young people, for example Pringle et al 2018, Frederick et al 2023, Dubois et al 2011, Bellis et al 2017 and Meltzer, Muir and Craig 2016.



## Space and time

The lived experience of child modern slavery, child trafficking and children's exploitation, as well as of prevention, support and recovery, has multiple geographies and contexts and is embedded in space, place, and time. Whilst some of this is explicitly focused on in certain reports, for example Franklin (2024a) on the prevention 'site' of education or Grant (2023) on outcomes for children in the 'short, medium and long-term', it also finds implicit mention across other parts of the children's research cohort and can be explored further as a cross-cutting theme.

Whilst not mentioned by Such and Aminu et al (2022) in relation to 'prevention pathways', or how prevention works, the evidence suggests that there are important spatial and temporal dimensions to the prevention of child exploitation.

Grant communicates the importance of '**being in a safe place**' as '**a human right for everyone**' (2023:2). Child protection has oft been conceptualised – and contested – in spatial terms, with child safeguarding focusing traditionally on harm in the home and the more recently developed 'contextual safeguarding' approach looking beyond this to the settings and spaces in the community and beyond where abuse and exploitation can occur. Franklin (2024a) finds that the specific needs of and risks facing diagnosed and undiagnosed children and young people with SEND in the community have not been incorporated into any consideration of contextual safeguarding and needs to be written in.

From a prevention perspective, Franklin (2024a) adopts Lloyd et al's 2003 notion of 'spaces and places' of interaction with children and young people to consider ways of 'opening spaces' creatively with children and young people with SEND in a school setting around issues of concern Before harm occurs and at the Early stages of identification. Franklin explores with young people with SEND and practitioners and professionals what types of environments or spaces might be conducive for conversations to take place that will signal and enable the prevention of potential child exploitation (these relate, for example, to set-up, confidentiality, location, and layout). She also considers the barriers to children accessing such spaces as well as the cultural shift necessary to create space to have open conversations with trusted adults in schools. Franklin also advocates for a shift in the notion of isolation as a 'punitive space' within schools to its reconceptualization as a safe space.

For Franklin, schools can act as a 'site' of prevention where safe spaces can be created where it's possible to identify and address risk factors around exploitation Before any harm occurs (2024a:3). Whilst other places are important too, schools are identified by children and young people with SEND as where they would feel most comfortable discussing issues around exploitation and where they think they could be heard. Beyond schools, Franklin – Report 5 – also suggests other 'sites' for prevention including youth services and initial encounters with youth justice or the police (2024a:5).

In relation to support for and recovery of young people with lived experience of human trafficking who have migrated to the UK, Hynes (2022) and Grant (2023) comment on the 'limbo' or liminal space associated with the immigration process that these young people are positioned in, feeling unsafe and full of uncertainty.

Conversely, Hynes seeks, through employing a participatory approach and a creative toolkit with young people affected by human trafficking, as well as by focusing on positive outcomes grounded in the General Principles of the UNCRC, to create 'rights-respecting spaces' (2022:9) as well as 'spaces of possibility' through a focus on futures and innovative approaches to research (2022:41).

Franklin (2024a) recounts how delays in identification and addressing risks related to children with SEND in education has meant that services only know about such exploitation when it is happening or after harm has occurred.

The risk of re-traumatising those affected by exploitation through an over-focus on previous events and 'talking about the past' when navigating through multiple systems is well documented, including by Grant (2023) in this cohort. Skeels (2024) and Hynes (2022) and Grant (2023) take care to state that their research is not focused on accounts of previous exploitation but on 'stable futures', pathways towards 'positive outcomes' and 'narratives of recovery'. This is important for an ethical approach, although of course disclosures around exploitation can potentially occur as part of any primary research conducted with those affected or at risk.

The research conducted by Grant (2023) intended to focus on exploring categories of outcomes for children and young people supported by the SGS in relation to specific timeframes – the short, medium, and long-term. However:

*'...it rapidly became apparent that these categories obscured how young people's lives were shaped by critical junctures, in the form of points in time when young people experienced events or processes that had either a positive or negative impact. The timings of these junctures were different for different individuals.'*

Grant, 2023:17

Such 'critical junctures' for young people include the transition to adulthood and adult service support with varied thresholds for eligibility.

Similarly, Hynes found that young people affected by human trafficking migrating to the UK did not think about their recovery, support, or outcomes in this way – such *'temporal framings were largely artificial in the lives of young people'* (2022:4).

For Franklin (2024a) 'pathways' from school exclusion to subsequent exploitation can be clearly identified from previous research. Opening 'spaces' for prevention must also include the provision of time within a school or other context (something that is often in very short supply for staff involved). Staff must find the flexibility and schools need to 'change the pace' and develop a culture within which such time and availability of staff for open conversations with children at risk to prevent any exploitation and harm Before it happens can be found.

For a positive perspective to achieve long term outcomes for children after experiencing exploitation, Hynes (2022), Grant (2023) and Skeels (2024) reinforce the importance of children's futures, hopes, aspirations and dreams.

## Cultural competence

Two research studies focusing on the experiences of adult survivors funded by Modern Slavery and Human Rights PEC from its Prevention Call focus wholly on 'cultural competency' (Brachou and Murphy, 2024; Shirgholami et al, forthcoming 2024). As a lens for reflecting on modern slavery prevention, then, this has potential value and importance.

Whilst not reflected in the pathways to prevention (Such and Aminu et al, 2022), culture plays an important role in relation to access to rights, services and support, power and control and cultural awareness an essential part of 'literacy' around the prevention of modern slavery.

'Cultural competency' is defined by Shirgholami et al as: **'a set of related behaviours, attitudes and policies that can enable professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations'** (forthcoming, 2024). Culture is broadly defined here as related to the protected characteristics of age, disability, gender assignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, sex and sexual orientation (Shirgholami et al, forthcoming 2024). For Brachou and Murphy, a cultural competency approach in this context aims to better understand 'the influence of culture on human trafficking and modern slavery prevention, as well as the potential for culturally competent approaches to support survivors' (2023:3). Both reports are focused predominantly on adults.

Whilst none of the seven child-focused reports have an intentional focus on 'cultural competency' – and this concept is only mentioned explicitly twice in this portfolio<sup>1</sup> – a systematic search against the nine protected characteristics above draws out relevant evidence on culture, religion and race (also linked to age), sex and disability.

1. For example, Hynes (report 4) mentions 'cultural competence' as a theme related to 'safety' as part of her global call for evidence and Skeels (report 3) as outlined in the main text below.

## Culture and religion

Celiksoy states that 'cultural misunderstanding' can mean that children and young adults at risk of, or affected by, human trafficking may be under-identified and overlooked. In addition, 'cultural differences' can play a role in whether children and young people recognise their own exploitation, alongside systemic and global inequality:

*'Exploitation might have been normalised due to cultural practices and norms (Interview #29). For instance, in some Southeast Asian cultures, there may be a perceived trade-off in exploitation and modern slavery (Interview #18). Exploitation in the host country may be viewed as a means to a better life in the long run, compared to their situation in their origin country*

Interview #4, #15, #23 (2024:24)

The importance of 'culture' (often connected to religion) for the recovery and support of young people affected by modern slavery is highlighted by both Skeels (2024) and referred to in Grant (2023) and Hynes (2022). Hynes' co-developed Positive Outcomes Framework, with young survivors, includes the outcome: 'Children report their cultural and religious needs are provided for and respected' (2022:24). In Skeels' study all young people participating in the research responded positively to the statement that because of support from my Barnardo's worker '...my culture, religion and identity are respected'. Grant (2023) also notes that the Scottish Guardianship Service offers support to young people in relation to cultural and language barriers faced.

Through targeted support such as the ICTG service, Skeels' research revealed that young people affected by modern slavery are helped to connect with their identity in culturally appropriate ways, 'essential for their full and ongoing protection and recovery' (2024:54) as well as their 'development, and a sense of belonging':

*'... young people spoke about instances where they had been supported to identify and visit places of worship and gain access to communities aligning with their own faith, as well as to find culturally appropriate food and items for their homes'*

Skeels, 2024:39

## Race and ethnicity

Evidence from wider child-focused research shows that institutional barriers, professionals' assumptions and bias related to ethnicity and race can impede the early identification of children and young people affected by modern slavery (Celiksoy, 2024).

According to Celiksoy, some children and young adults, particularly from minority ethnic communities, receive less early-stage support and therefore any exploitation is less likely to be identified due to a lack of proactive relationship-building efforts by professionals. Simultaneously, those at risk of exploitation may 'hesitate to share information due to a lack of trust in officials and the fear of not being believed or facing repercussions' (2024:33). One interviewee in the study suggests that missing episodes and exploitation of children and young adults from a White British background are responded to with more urgency' (Celiksoy, 2024:19).

Similarly, Franklin's research (2024b) reports bias, whether conscious or unconscious, around children and young people from different ethnicities. Concerns raised by research respondents from Black communities connect this to adultification<sup>2</sup> and an 'under-identification of child modern slavery and an over-focus on criminality, gang-membership, or behaviour deemed 'violent' amongst Black boys' (Franklin, 2024b:25), reflecting and reinforcing Shirgholami et al.'s findings that:

*'Racial prejudice and the adultification of children were noted by our research participants as significant barriers to prevention and receiving support at the point of identification. Research has shown that adultification means risk can be misidentified or exploitation signs can be missed. Participants also stated that, in their experience, non-white children, particularly those aged 16 and 17, are often treated as adults and arrested instead of being protected. Black boys, for example, are labelled as offenders, troublemakers, or gang members, which impacts safeguarding responses. Black children are also not considered as high-risk when missing.'*

Forthcoming 2024

Grant (2023) suggests that there are barriers faced by young survivors engaging in relevant support services connected to race. For one young person in this study, it was difficult 'in the early days to open up to people, particularly after some early interactions with professionals who had little experience of working with separated children or knowledge about the needs of Black children' (Grant, 2023:24).

2. Davis and Marsh (2020) define 'adultification' as: 'when notions of innocence and vulnerability are not afforded to certain children. This is determined by people and institutions who hold power over them. When adultification occurs outside of the home it is always founded within discrimination and bias' (in Franklin, p. 25).

Once engaged, such services can support children and young people who face racism in wider society<sup>3</sup>, suggests Grant, but this is not always the case. Hynes (2022) outlines accounts of racism from young survivors who had migrated to the UK, with disbelief by professionals as one manifestation of this. This 'resonates with' the evidence from the UK literature scoping review and UK submissions from the global call:

*'...some young people highlighted the bordered nature of their encounters with professionals, at times offering accounts of what they explicitly framed as racist and discriminatory attitudes from those whose duty it is to safeguard and ensure best interests, such as social workers, the police and asylum case workers. Young people highlighted not being believed as a key issue permeating their encounters with professionals. Disbelief was highlighted in the context of age, trafficking experiences and claims of asylum'*

Hynes, 2022:26

Franklin (2024b) notes that challenges are also faced in relation to race and ethnicity by children with SEND. The research indicates 'an under-identification of SEND and inequalities in SEND support received for children from ethnic minority groups, meaning that vulnerabilities and risk may also be misattributed or not recognised in this group of children (Strand and Lindorff, 2018)' (Franklin, 2024b:26). She also suggests that children with SEND who are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children can have their needs and signs of trafficking misattributed to language or cultural barriers or traumatic experiences experienced on route to the UK and therefore 'harm for this group may continue for longer before being recognised (Hershkowitz et al, 2007)' (2024b:5).

## Sex

The assumption that some forms of exploitation only affect girls or boys is highlighted in three studies (Celiksoy, 2024; Skeels, 2024; Franklin, 2024b). These assumptions, suggest practitioners, as well as previous studies, can lead, for example, to the under-identification of girls affected by criminal exploitation or boys affected by sexual exploitation. The reality of exploitation, evidence suggests, is far more nuanced and complex. This suggests that there is value in further exploration of this area in future research.

3. One CYP in Grant's study (Report 2) shared experiencing racism on the bus, and that a therapist helped them access a bus pass, so they did not have to interact with the bus drivers. Another CYP shared an experience of racism from young people in their accommodation, despite feeling supported by staff themselves.

## Disability – SEND

Children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) are considered significantly at risk of and affected by modern slavery in the UK. Based on several references to prior studies and research including that of Franklin, Celiksoy (2024) states that children and young people with SEND may be more vulnerable to exploitation. Research participants also highlight concerns over isolation and loneliness and associated risks experienced as well as limitations children and young people with SEND can face in relation to sufficiently establishing appropriate boundaries and recognising their own exploitation.

Franklin's study (2024a) is wholly and extensively concerned with how services and professionals, particularly within a school/education setting, can be competent in relation to identifying and prevention modern slavery amongst children and young people with SEND. The report addresses how a better understanding of the needs of children with SEND, through building trusted relationships and having 'open conversations' – might help identify the risk of modern slavery before it happens.

Franklin's second study (2024b) highlights the lack of policy/guidance, knowledge, training and understanding about SEND affecting the identification of potential exploitation. Franklin draws on previous research to state that children and young people with (undiagnosed) SEND may have specific vulnerabilities due to their communication, learning or neurodivergent needs which are often unmet by current service structures. These needs are often not recognised or well understood by multi agency services who rarely receive training in communicating or working with this group of children (Franklin et al, 2015:3). For example, practitioners may not understand how autism or ADHD affect a child's understanding of risk and social cues, or they may define them as 'challenging' and not understand behaviour 'as a form of communication of stress, anxiety and fear' (Franklin, 2024b:23-24). Franklin notes that practitioners 'across many services gave examples of concerning gaps in understanding leading to missed opportunities to recognise early, report and respond to cases of modern slavery' particularly for children and young people with SEND, 'despite modern slavery services seeing a clear link between SEND and heightened risk of exploitation' (2024b:24). Parents participating in the study shared experiences that verified this assessment.

Hynes recommends that future research on positive outcomes 'might also focus on ensuring these are culturally and contextually relevant for a broader range of young people who have overcome trafficking' (2022:43). Skeels (2024) suggests that the concerns of children and young people with SEND could be more fully considered in future research on the impact of the ICTG service on young survivors' outcomes.

## Mental health

Modern Slavery PEC's funded research on children includes evidence on the mental health of children and young people, including trauma, in association with risk, the identification and prevention of modern slavery, recovery and support. In other words, mental health has relevance across all stages of the 'BETR prevention continuum'. Access to mental health support as an essential service and right is also demonstrated as an important 'prevention pathway' (Such and Aminu et al, 2022).

### Poor mental health, risk and identification

Poor mental health is identified in two reports (Celiksoy, 2024; Ayeb-Karlsson, 2024) as a risk factor that makes children more vulnerable to modern slavery. In addition, poor *parental* mental health is recognised as an Adverse Childhood Experience where children lose the protective effect of family and guardians, further increasing the risk of exploitation (Celiksoy, 2024). Parents interviewed in Franklin's (2024b) study found their child's experience of exploitation and navigating the systems related to this had negatively impacted upon their own mental health.

Mental health in relation to early identification and prevention of exploitation is only explicitly discussed in detail by Franklin (2024a; 2024b) and in relation to children with SEND. Franklin also notes that the definition of SEND includes children and young people whose experiences and trauma significantly impacts their daily life and learning (2024a:2). Social, emotional and mental health needs are the second most identified need for children who have SEND but are without an EHC<sup>4</sup> (Franklin, 2024a; 2024b). Given that poor mental health increases the risk of exploitation, training and knowledge about SEND is essential for better identification of this potentially vulnerable population.

Participants – both parents and practitioners – in Franklin's study state that **'many services fail to acknowledge the unmet...trauma, or mental health needs that underlie a child's responses and behaviours, thus leading to increased vulnerability to exploitation and reduced identification opportunities.'** (Franklin, 2024b:23). Practitioners suggest that the practice of moving children with SEND to accommodate them out of area is not always preferable, particularly 'those with high levels of anxiety, learning and mental health needs.' To address this and better support identification, young people participating in Franklin's study (2024a) said that staff, when working with them to build trusted relationships, should consider that mental health and SEND can have distinct but interplaying impacts on young people.

4. An Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan is a legal document that describes a child or young person's special educational, health and social care needs. It explains the extra help that will meet those needs and how that help will support the child or young person to achieve what they want to in their life.



The difficulties faced by children and young people with SEND in accessing mental health services are highlighted by Franklin in both her reports. Parents engaged in the research spoke about the challenges around access to and long waiting times for SEND diagnosis from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)<sup>5</sup> and how this affected their child's mental health, as well as 'the responses from services to the exploitation' (Franklin, 2024b:45). Practitioners also report challenges faced when referring children for mental health support through CAMHS due to long waiting times (Franklin, 2024a, 2024b), needing permission from parents (which was not always forthcoming) (Franklin, 2024a) and high thresholds for referral (Franklin, 2024b). Franklin (2024b) also flags that CAMHS is not available once children reach the age of 18, even though they may still need mental health support. For Franklin (2024b) all of this contributes to the underdiagnosis of children with SEND.

In the participatory workshops held as part of Hynes' research (2022), young people also spoke about challenges related to access to psychological or psycho-social support. Submissions to the global call for this study also:

*'...raised concerns regarding child victims' ability to access appropriate support, particularly mental health support, which was a significant barrier to positive outcomes due to high thresholds for services and the instability in a child's life.'*

Hynes, 2022:36

## 'System trauma'

Grant's research (2023) plus four of the other child-focused studies (Celiksoy, 2024; Skeels, 2024; Hynes, 2022; Ayeb-Karlsson, 2024) highlight the adverse impact on young people's mental health of the immigration system and asylum process.

Grant draws on Rigby and Malloch (2023:10) to state that children and young people who have been exposed to abuse and exploitation can experience 'system trauma' when navigating complex systems of asylum, care and support. Tensions arise in practice as the concerns of child protection and asylum compete.

Young people supported by the Scottish Guardianship Service indicate asylum-related 'stressors' contributing to their poor mental health: '**...key stages of the asylum process (when they were interviewed, often at length, about their experiences), the longer-term experience of waiting for the outcome...**' (Grant, 2023: 23).

5. Grant (Report 2) however mentions uncritically as 'trauma services' in Scotland - In addition, physical and mental health teams, both in the statutory and third sector, including specialist mental health services and specifically CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services NHS Scotland), Anchor (NHS GGC Glasgow Psychological Trauma Service) and Freedom from Torture, as well as the Allies service mentioned earlier.

More generally, young people in two studies (Grant, 2023 and Hynes, 2022) emphasise the traumatic experiences of having to share their story of exploitation, in multiple contexts, 'often repeatedly and at length, with professionals' (Grant, 2023:25); 'I had to keep telling my story, over and over again (young person, session 5, location 1, May 2022)' (Hynes, 2022:33).

Reflections from professionals engaged in Hynes research (2022) suggest that 'system trauma' can be one of the biggest barriers for young people in their ability to recover from experiences of trafficking. For Grant, repeated exposure to system trauma can prevent the 'ontological security (sense of predictability about the future)' that children and young people who have experienced exploitation need to recover in the longer term (2023:29).

An analysis of case closure summaries in Skeels concludes that 'for many young people, waiting for their asylum decision was the biggest factor negatively impacting on their mental health' (2024:41). And for Hynes 'waiting for documentation affects the mental health of young people and hinders their ability to feel safe' (2022:28).

Ayeb-Karlsson (2024) explores the trauma involved in immigration and social care systems combined through her study of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) placed with 'highly traumatised' and sometimes suicidal adults in Home Office' hotels. The 'sheer trauma' of these young people's journeys to the UK (Ayeb-Karlsson, 2024:27) are compounded by being wrongly assessed as adults and accommodated in adult hotels, where they faced further trauma and the risk of sexual abuse, exploitation and (re)trafficking by other adults. She also mentions a lack of mental health support, trauma healing and psychological wellbeing service provision for children accommodated in hotels, the absence of which 'not only impacts their development but also renders them more vulnerable to grooming and exploitation by traffickers' (2024:38-9).

Grant (2023) takes care to note that despite difficulties highlighted by interview participants in relation to the overall trauma to children and young people regarding multiple welfare and immigration systems, there are clear indications of progress, recovery and positive outcomes for many young people.

## Mental health support and recovery

Mental health services and support for psychological development are important for the recovery of children and young people affected by modern slavery. Evidence from Hynes' (2022) UK literature review and global evidence call reinforces this. For Ayeb-Karlsson (2024) mental health support, trauma healing, and psychological wellbeing services (amongst others) are essential services that unaccompanied children seeking asylum need for their own development and to limit their vulnerability to exploitation and re-trafficking.

One young survivor interviewed by Grant articulates what such mental health support would mean in the shorter-term:

*'I would say, it's just trying to, like, find somewhere comfy, somewhere safe. And trying to, like, get them engaged. Because...coming in with lots of trauma...they find it hard to actually go out, you understand? But the more, when they stay indoors, the more the problem, the more they stress, and everything just pile up on the individual. (Interview 2, young person)'*

Grant, 2023:20

Both the ICTG service and Scottish Guardianship Service are trauma-informed and place emphasis on mental health support (Skeels, 2024; Grant, 2023). ICTG service practitioners highlight the importance for children and young people affected by human trafficking of: 'positive mental health, self-image and confidence, increased integration, feeling included, able to heal, their identity respected, feeling happiness and well-being' (Skeels, 2024:42). Young people participating in the research almost all agreed that because of support from the ICTG service their 'body and mind' were 'healthy'. Most young people interviewed about the Scottish Guardianship Service had been offered mental health support, including seeing a counsellor, a psychologist or group therapeutic support. One young person shared positive experiences of support from a psychologist: 'she's made me feel safe'. Some interviewees did however have "ambivalence" about mental health support and chose not to attend or pursue this (Grant, 2023:23).

## Systems Navigation

Children at risk of and affected by modern slavery are often navigating complex statutory systems, such as those related to social care, criminal justice and immigration. As set out in the section on 'system trauma' above, these can sometimes create additional risk of exploitation. From a 'prevention pathways' (Such and Aminu et al, 2022) perspective, these systems relate to access to rights and essential services and impact on children and young people's actual and sense of power and control over their own lives. The 'literacy' around child modern slavery of professionals working within these systems is also relevant.

## Social care

Social workers employed by local authorities, as one of several 'first responders' authorised to refer children to the UK's system of modern slavery identification and support, the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), refer the highest numbers

of children (Skeels, 2024). As Skeels notes, the ICTG service 'does not work alone to support children and young people with lived experience of modern slavery' and social workers are by far the most common professionals engaged (2024:45). Skeels notes the scale of this support, with social services helping 45% of children after ICTG cases were closed, based on a sample of 400 case closure files examined in the report.

The important role of social workers in identifying and supporting children and young people who have been affected by modern slavery and is also detailed in two other studies (Grant, 2023 and Hynes, 2022). Social workers offer practical support with accommodation, accessing education and navigation of relevant services. They also work to promote the Best Interests of children (Article 3 of the UNCRC) and help them to attain their rights (Hynes, 2022). All three studies conducting research directly with children and young people affected by modern slavery heard that being listened to, feeling safe and cared for and having good relationships with their social workers mattered to them. Grant's report identifies a positive correlation between children who had positive relationships with their social worker and whether they felt they had choice and agency in decisions on where they studied or lived.

However, the practices and attitudes of some social workers can present a challenge to the effective protection of children and young people identified as at risk of or affected by modern slavery. Five studies (Celiksoy, 2024; Grant, 2023; Skeels, 2024; Hynes, 2022; Franklin, 2024b) highlight such aspects of social work practice:

- Understanding of Modern Slavery and human trafficking is variable, linked to gaps in guidance and training (Franklin, 2024b:16) and there is a need for further training to support identification (Celiksoy, 2024:35).
- The workload and time constraints limit the amount of time spent on building relationships with young people and progressing multi-agency work (Grant, 2023:24-5). One ICTG worker reports that social workers are 'extremely busy' with 'big caseloads' and that this can be an 'obstacle' to recognising signs of exploitation.
- Young people described the 'bordered nature of their encounters with professionals', including disbelief in their experiences or discrimination (Hynes, 2022:26).
- Frequent changes in social worker impacts on young people's ability to build positive experiences with their social worker (Hynes, 2022).

Three studies (Celiksoy, 2024; Grant, 2023; Ayeb-Karlsson, 2024) discuss the role of social care legislation and practice in identifying and supporting child modern slavery. Two studies, (Celiksoy, 2024; Ayeb-Karlsson, 2024) refer to the Children Act 1989, and Amendment (in 2004), and its role in safeguarding and protecting children (including those who have been affected by modern slavery).

They highlight some areas where the social care system needs further attention:

- Early identification of child modern slavery is not fully supported through existing national legislation as The Children Act 1989 and Children Act 2004 do not address all forms of exploitation and so miss opportunities for early identification. Two research participants in one study noted that such legislation is designed to address the risk of interfamilial harm to children (e.g. neglect) rather than extra-familial harm and, as a result, some cases of exploitation are overlooked (Celiksoy, 2024).
- Children in Need data held by the Department of Education highlights 'significant discrepancies between those officially identified as potential victims and children with modern slavery related factors in their child in need assessment', suggesting cases of child modern slavery are overlooked (Celiksoy, 2024:14).
- The statutory duty of local authorities regarding Children in Need notes that this is a 'de facto criterion met by all unaccompanied children' as they do not have adults who can care for them. Local authorities therefore have a duty to be safeguarding these children and appropriately and safely accommodating them. A Legal Case Analysis included in the report explores whether this duty was met in relation to a young person in 2021 (Ayeb-Karlsson, 2024:23).
- Ayeb-Karlsson also states that children accommodated in hotels should be provided with social care services to support their wellbeing and development (2024:38).

Of the 40 practitioners engaged in Franklin's research (2024b), the largest group were social care/social workers. Franklin discusses the importance of social care workers having the understanding and awareness of both modern slavery and SEND, as well as the relationships between them. This is identified as a problem that needs addressing through national legislation and local policy and practice. The report summarises:

*'... there is a lack of joined-up thinking across statutory guidance which would aid the better protection of children and young people with SEND - in short there is little recognition of increased vulnerability and risk for children and young people within SEND in policy and guidance, and discussion of appropriate preventative measures and responses. Additionally, there is an absence of specificity within safeguarding and modern slavery policy and guidance to this group's need.'*

Franklin, 2024b:11

An example the authors share is that the SEND Code of Practice (developed jointly by the Department for Education and the DHSC in accordance with the pursuant to part 3 of the Children and Families Act (2014)) does not attend to Modern Slavery or human trafficking. A key challenge identified by the authors is that this group of children are falling, or at risk of falling, through the gap between services (and this includes social care).

*'It is crucial to ensure that unaccompanied children seeking asylum receive adequate educational activities and social care support. Many of these children face boredom and lack access to essential services, including mental health support, trauma healing, and psychological wellbeing services. The absence of such provisions not only impacts their development but also renders them more vulnerable to grooming and exploitation by traffickers.'*

Ayeb-Karlsson, 2024:38-9

## Criminal justice

Five studies highlight the criminalisation of children affected by modern slavery (Celiksoy, 2024; Grant, 2023; Skeels, 2024; Hynes, 2022; Ayeb-Karlsson, 2024). For example:

*'...the more recent re-trend of criminalising young people...in the criminal justice system, that's been a huge obstacle. We've seen a huge increase in young people referrals from [young offenders' institution] [...] And we know that in international and domestic policy, they should be treated as children first. And in a lot of ways, yes, that does happen, but policy isn't always put into practice. (Interview 22, Guardian)'*

Grant, 2023:26

The criminalisation of children affected by modern slavery and associated 'victim blaming' attitude and practice negatively impacts on early identification and prevention, as reported by research participants and widely in the literature (Celiksoy, 2024). The literature review conducted by Ayeb-Karlsson supports this, stating that where children do 'not conform to 'ideal victim' stereotypes', they 'can be more readily dismissed as 'complicit' in their own abuse' and highlights the impact upon the treatment of Albanian boys and young men (2024:11).

Hynes' (2022) scoping review also highlights the criminalisation of children, particularly those affected by child criminal and sexual exploitation. Her study,

conducted through a child-rights based approach, posits that criminal justice (as well as immigration and asylum) structures and systems pose a barrier for children achieving positive outcomes and that these systems are not in their best interests (i.e. Article 3 of the UNCRC).

Two studies (Grant, 2023 and Hynes, 2022) state there is a conflict between the criminal justice system and the child protection system and this schism is likely to be exacerbated by the Illegal Migration Act. Hynes (2022) raises that this is a challenge for (a) multi-agency working amongst professionals and (b) how support could be hindered for children and young people affected by modern slavery if the focus is on criminality and not on the exploitation.

Grant (2023) notes that this criminalisation of young people is an important area for of further research because of the impact on survivors' support and recovery.

An insight into how services might support and protect children from being criminalised is provided by the ICTG service evaluation conducted by Skeels (2024) and, to some extent, by Grant (2022). Through providing advocacy and support, the ICTG service helps to ensure that young people are seen and treated as victims of criminal exploitation and not criminals and two case studies in the report help to illustrate this. In one case, an ICTG service practitioner challenged 'victim blaming' language used in a Child Protection Plan. In a second, another ICTG service practitioner ensured the safety of a young person due to appear in court by helping him to secure an online rather than in-person hearing (Skeels, 2024). Skeels (2024) also shares a case study of the police force working with ICTG service practitioner and local services to keep a young person safe through tracking a perpetrator and thus meeting an evidence threshold for an Interim Slavery and Trafficking Risk Order (STRO). Grant's (2023) case file analysis shows that almost half of the young people in the Scottish Guardianship Service undergoing a police interview needed to be debriefed afterwards by a support worker also indicating criminal justice system support. Given that the police are one of the 'first responders' referring over 25% of children to the NRM, Franklin suggests that 'earlier conversations' with staff in police and youth justice settings might support earlier identification of risk for children and young people with SEND (2024b:5).

Celiksoy (2024) shares an example of an intervention – Oasis Restore in Medway – which has provided the replacement of a youth prison service with a newly developed secure education facility that focuses on acknowledging and supporting the trauma experienced by young survivors of criminal exploitation, rather than reinforcing it through their criminalisation.

Celiksoy (2024) offers insight into prevention intervention projects in the UK. Of the 23 reviewed, 9% were funded by the police, 30% "placed a focus on policing and the criminal justice system" (p. 26). Local authorities have initiatives that relate to "avoiding stereotyping victim profiles; resolving victim blaming language; preventing victim criminalisation" (p. 7). Limited resources within police forces

impact the capacity of officers to engage in early intervention. Professional training to aid understanding, including for police workers, was identified in lots of interviews (Celiksoy, 2024) and specifically about the risk for children with SEND who are reported missing to police by services and families (Franklin, 2024b). In terms of identification, practitioners said closer links between communities and police services were a possible route to help increase education about risks (Franklin, 2024b). A specific issue relating to the police was that information should be shared between police forces when a child is moving between different areas (Franklin, 2024b) and similarly Skeels (2024) noted that police (and social care) may not report missing data with ICTG and so data may not be wholly accurate.

Hynes (2022) notes psychological safety, the trust and ability to share without judgement or punishment, was important to young people and that the police (along with interpreters) were seen as a professional group who could help to provide this. Being treated equally by, for example police, was noted as an area identified by young people for the Positive Outcomes Framework.

## Immigration status

Immigration policies and procedures are explicitly highlighted by two studies (Celiksoy, 2024; Hynes, 2022) increasing the risk of exploitation for young people. Celiksoy's (2024) findings (academic literature review and empirical research) suggest that unstable immigration status makes individuals more susceptible to exploitation and leaves unaccompanied asylum-seeking children more vulnerable. Children's risk of exploitation due to unstable immigration status is also noted by Hynes with young people being 'pushed out to the edges of society and towards dangerous and exploitative situations' (2022:27) as they waited at length for immigration decisions.

Ayeb-Karlsson specifically talks about the concept of lawfare, which 'can be weaponised to delegitimise, de-emphasise, and oppress the legal entitlements owed to specific communities such as children, people claiming asylum and refugees' (Handmaker in Ayeb-Karlsson, 2024:18).

The negative impacts on children and young people affected by human trafficking of unstable immigration status and experiences of navigating the immigration system feature in three studies (Grant, 2023; Skeels, 2024; Hynes, 2022) and have already been discussed in the section on 'system trauma'.

Two reports (Celiksoy, 2024; Hynes, 2022) refer to the triangulation of evidence that suggests how children's navigation of the immigration process can present a barrier to positive outcomes for them or have negative consequences such as re-traumatisation.



Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are a population group that is specifically identified across six of the research studies (Celiksoy, 2024; Grant, 2023; Skeels, 2024; Hynes, 2022; Franklin, 2024b, Ayeb-Karlsson, 2024). They are not mentioned in Franklin (2024a). UASC are a particularly vulnerable group and Ayeb-Karlsson's research is wholly focused on UASC in relation to their placement in Home Office' hotels and related increased risk of trafficking, re-trafficking, and exploitation. Celiksoy's study also refers to 'unsafe and inappropriate accommodation' for UASCs that many research participants interviewed highlighted (2024:19).

Four studies (Celiksoy, 2024; Grant, 2023; Skeels, 2024; Ayeb-Karlsson, 2024) express concerns and caution about the passing of the Illegal Migration Act<sup>6</sup> and the Nationality and Borders Act. Concerns relate to:

- The impact on the extent (greater) and detection (lesser) of child exploitation (Celiksoy, 2024; Grant, 2023; Skeels, 2024; Ayeb-Karlsson, 2024).
- Increased numbers of children going missing (Ayeb-Karlsson, 2024).
- Barriers to early identification of children who are at risk of, or experiencing exploitation (Skeels, 2024) if children fear they'll be asked to leave the country upon disclosure.
- The potential focus on immigration over the protection of children and the 'duties of local authorities under the child welfare framework' (Ayeb-Karlsson, 2024:20) and how this may affect multi-agency work (Grant, 2023, referencing prior literature)
- The hostile environment that professionals and services are operating in (e.g. the ICTG service) (Celiksoy, 2024; Skeels, 2024) and the 'ability to access appropriate support for children who had been trafficked' (Skeels, 2024:27)
- Children could be removed from the country before they reach the age of 18 (Grant, 2023; Ayeb-Karlsson, 2024)
- Unaccompanied children's asylum claims could be deemed inadmissible (Grant, 2023; Ayeb-Karlsson, 2024)
- The powers to detain children (Ayeb-Karlsson, 2024:20)
- The extended provisions on age determinations (Ayeb-Karlsson, 2024:20)
- The limitations on leave (Ayeb-Karlsson, 2024:20)
- The impact on practice in devolved nations as trafficking is at the confluence of a number of policy areas that include a mix of devolved (e.g. health and social care) and reserved matters (e.g. immigration) (Grant, 2023).

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6. While the Modern Slavery provisions in the Illegal Migration Act have not been operationalised, the discourse around their passage through parliament caused these concerns

More broadly, three reports talk about the negative impact of political rhetoric on young people's experiences (Skeels, 2024; Hynes, 2022; Ayeb-Karlsson, 2024). The studies draw attention to the wider context of the 'hostile environment' (both policies and discourse) which forms the backdrop for children's experiences of the immigration system. The professionals interviewed by Ayeb-Karlsson referred specifically to the Rwanda relocation plan and the fear amongst Albanian boys from vilification and 'the threat of deportation to Albania or being sent to Rwanda' (2024:34).

## Legal advice and support

The importance of access to legal advice, aid and support including solicitors, in turn related to children's navigation of statutory systems, were mentioned by four of the seven reports (Celiksoy, 2024; Grant, 2023; Hynes, 2022 and Ayeb-Karlsson, 2024).

Hynes' (2022) study reveals insights from young people who have or are going through the asylum process on their experiences with lawyers. In this report, solicitors and lawyers are recognised as an important group of professionals by non-UK born young people affected by modern slavery in relation to: (1) the quality of the legal advice they provide, i.e., 'doing a good job' (Hynes, 2022:31) (2) the reliability of their service (appointments are not cancelled) and (3) the quality of the relationships built, i.e., where young people feel cared for, can disclose and are supported to better navigate the immigration and asylum system. In addition, states Hynes (2022): 'The importance of high-quality legal advice for children affected by trafficking was also highlighted in multiple submissions to the global call' (Hynes, 2022:31). Non-UK born young people affected by human trafficking and engaged in Hynes' research co-create the positive outcome statement 'I have good quality legal representation' as part of enabling the best interests of the child. Independent guardians can play an important role in helping young people find suitable lawyers or solicitors, but these may already be in place (Hynes 2022; Skeels 2024).

Of the remaining three studies, Celiksoy (2024) echoes Franklin's (2024a) concern around the importance of legal representation for families of children with SEND when faced with potential school breakdown and exclusion, known to increase the risk of exploitation (Franklin, 2024a; 2024b). Grant (2023) sets out the difficulties faced by one young research participant 'sharing their journey and experiences with lawyers': 'I went through hell to give them all the information' (p.17). Finally, Ayeb-Karlsson's legal case analysis (2024) provides examples of where solicitors have acted (or not) on the behalf of children to ensure their needs are met. She also recommends that legal aid should be provided for children who are part of the National Transfer Scheme.

## Going missing

All seven studies include evidence on children and young people going missing from statutory support. Going missing can be an indicator of a child or young person being affected by trafficking or re-trafficking or can indicate a risk of exploitation before it happens (Franklin, 2024b; Celiksoy, 2024). As such, it is an important 'red flag' for the prevention of child modern slavery and an indicator that effective 'prevention pathways' (Such and Aminu et al, 2022) are not in place.

Three research studies report on children going missing from hotel accommodation (Celiksoy, 2024; Grant, 2023; Ayeb-Karlsson, 2024), two of which specify that that these children are UASC.

Four studies in the portfolio discuss 'looked after children' or children in care going missing from care or from their accommodation (Celiksoy, 2024; Grant, 2023; Franklin, 2024b and Ayeb-Karlsson, 2024). Unlike the others, Ayeb-Karlsson's study (2024) pertains only to children in care who are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. Grant (2023) reports an increased focus in the high number of separated and care-experienced children going missing across the UK and notes that ECPAT UK had reported that 31% of children in care in England suspected or identified as trafficked (378 of 1,231 children) went missing at least once in 2020.

There has been substantial interest and concern about the number of separated and care experienced children going missing across the UK recently. ECPAT UK – Missing People (2016) indicated 28% of children in care suspected or identified as trafficked (167 of 590 children) across the UK in 2014-15 had gone missing at least once, a figure that had increased to 31% (378 of 1,231 children) in 2020 (Missing People – ECPAT UK 2022).

The two studies that discuss children and young people going 'missing' in greatest detail are Franklin (2024b) in relation to children with SEND and Ayeb-Karlsson (2024) whose substantive focus is unaccompanied asylum-seeking children housed in and going missing from Home Office accommodation.

Franklin's (2024a) research includes significant detail on the experiences of practitioners and parents. She notes that policy guidance for local authorities (i.e. the *Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care (2014)*) does not adequately account for SEND even though SEND may play a factor in traffickers persuading or coercing children and young people.

Practitioners participating in the study agreed that some practitioners and services did not adequately account for SEND in assessing the vulnerability of children and young people. They also shared that the period when children return from being missing is a key opportunity to prevent future exploitation or further missing episodes and that a multi-agency approach and information sharing (including with schools) could better help prevent children frequently going

missing. They identified a lack of communication between police forces and local authorities when children were moving between different service areas. The discussion with practitioners also revealed inconsistent approaches in different regions in responding to missing episodes with variable services and procedures. Examples included one service where a child going missing five times did not have their risk level raised, and another service where a daily meeting is scheduled to discuss missing children.

Parents had variable experiences of the response to their children going missing. One parent reported her child missing 200 times in a year and another found services were unwilling to help her as they 'knew' where her child was. Out of Area Placement children with SEND may be particularly likely to go missing to return to a sense of belonging and professions and carers should be trained on this (Franklin; 2024b).

Ayeb-Karlsson (2024) notes in her study of children going missing from Home Office' hotels that: 'It is generally recognised that a significant number of unaccompanied children go missing within the first 72 hours of arriving at the hotels' (Rhees-Cooper in Ayeb-Karlsson, 2024:10). The scale of these children going missing is significant and shocking: 440 missing episodes of children aged 12 and over from Home Office hotels across the UK were reported by the media over a two-year period (among a population of 5,400 UASCs). Traffickers, Ayeb-Karlsson states, targeted Home Office' accommodation specifically (and this is also noted in Celiksoy, 2024). Reasons for children going missing identified in the report include poor management, conditions and safeguarding in the hotels and prolonged stays for where there are few services, education support or comfort for children increasing the risk of them going missing. In addition, children's past experiences, fears and precarity and traffickers deliberately targeting such accommodation are strong contributing factors. A substantial number of these children remain missing, and the report strongly recommends an inquiry to investigate this and to locate them.

Ayeb-Karlsson (2024) takes care to point out that Albanian young people with lived experience of being placed in the hotels, professionals working with Albanian asylum-seeking children and young people, as well as a policing professionals all stressed a heightened risk for Albanian boys going missing irrespective of accommodation type.

Finally, the two studies (Grant, 2023; Skeels, 2024) focusing on the services supporting children and young people affected by human trafficking in England, Wales and Scotland include statistics on children going missing. Skeels' evaluation of the ICTG service found that around '10% of children supported by the service February 2017-September 2022 had at least one episode of going 'missing' during the period of support and a small minority (2%) had over 10 missing episodes.' (2024:10). One of the functions of Regional Practice Coordinators in the ICTG service is to follow up on missing children and young

people (Skeels, 2024). Grant (2023) states that 5% of children have gone missing during their time under the Scottish Guardianship Service over the 11-year period to October 2022, either overnight or for a short period, and another 5% are long-term or permanently missing.

## Transitions

The term 'transition' is used by five out of the seven Modern Slavery and Human Rights PEC funded studies focused on children, predominantly to explore the challenges and support for children at risk of or affected by modern slavery once they turn 18 or at other key thresholds related to service provision (Celiksoy, 2024; Skeels, 2024; Hynes, 2022; Franklin, 2024b; Ayeb-Karlsson, 2024). The remaining two reports (Grant, 2023; Franklin, 2024a) respectively note the higher age limit at 25 of statutory service support for care-experienced children and children with SEND. Such transitions connect to 'prevention pathways' (Such and Aminu et al, 2022) as they present different thresholds for eligibility, affect access to essential services and require multi-agency coordination to provide effective support.

Transition of children and young people from child-focused to adult-focused services and support is discussed in five reports (Celiksoy, 2024; Skeels, 2024; Hynes, 2022; Franklin, 2024b, Ayeb-Karlsson, 2024). Hynes places significant emphasis on this issue:

*'Various submissions to the global call highlighted transitions to adulthood as presenting significant barriers to achieving good outcomes as young people find themselves without adequate support or for those without leaving care entitlements. This was also a key concern of young people during participatory sessions'*

2022:28

Celiksoy notes that the transition into adulthood can potentially make children more vulnerable and can be a period of higher risk, as discussed in the wider literature and confirmed by interviews as facing a 'cliff edge' of support (2024:22).

The reasons provided for an increased potential vulnerability at transition at 18 (or 25 for children with SEND and care-experienced children) from across the reports include:

- Less / different forms of support for formerly looked after children including unaccompanied asylum-seeking children who felt 'less safe' and faced 'numerous barriers to achieving positive outcomes...particularly for those within protracted immigration processes' (Hynes, 2022:5)

- ‘...greater independence, and protective parents or carers will have less influence and authority over decision making’ [Celiksoy, 2024:22]
- A change or end in service provision and higher thresholds for accessing Local Authority adult services support (Celiksoy, 2024; Skeels, 2024; Hynes, 2022; Franklin, 2024b, Ayeb-Karlsson, 2024)
- The ‘role modelling, safeguarding, and support that CYA (children and young adults) have experienced until this point are no longer present, making them more vulnerable’ (Celiksoy, 2024:22)
- The Illegal Migration Act’s power for unaccompanied children under the NRM to be removed from the UK once they transition into adulthood, or before, under certain circumstances if operationalised (Ayeb-Karlsson, 2024)

Four population groups of children are specifically noted in relation to transition, risk and vulnerability:

- Children approaching the age of 18 and still awaiting asylum decisions by the Home Office (Celiksoy, 2024; Hynes 2022). Hynes’ (2022) study found that children at this age felt less safe moving into adulthood and that such waiting was a barrier to positive outcomes in the long term.
- Looked after children (Celiksoy, 2024; Hynes, 2022);
- Children with SEND (Franklin, 2024b). Practitioners engaged in the research were concerned about children with SEND and the removal of accommodation support, CAHMS provision and changes in NRM referrals. Parents interviewed were also concerned about how policy and practice align over the period of transition. For example, one parent worried she could not act as an Appropriate Adult for her son if he was arrested after he turned 18, even though he needed support in communication as he could unnecessarily incriminate himself otherwise.
- UASC who undergo age assessments by the Home Office to determine whether children’s or adults’ accommodation should be provided (Celiksoy, 2024; Ayeb-Karlsson, 2024). The proportion of children this affects is high: two thirds of those considered (nearly 900 children) had been initially incorrectly assessed and placed in adult accommodation in 2022 according to a research participant who had conducted an FOI request (Ayeb-Karlsson, 2024).

Skeels (2024) offers insight into how transitions are managed within the ICTG service. The ICTG ‘Pyramid of Service Support’, developed based on evidence from the research, has at its apex: ‘Aid young people to transition well, with ongoing support for as long as is needed’ (Skeels, 2024:31). This is closely coupled with a focus on gaining skills for independence.

The research shows that young people could remain in the service post-18 to access support if they were assessed to require this and if they agreed. Analysis of 400 case closure summaries as part of the research revealed that direct and indirect workers in the ICTG service committed to ensuring ongoing support was available to all young people where this was required and possible post transition from service, whether case closure was at 18 or before. Others were being supported in the transition to adulthood by an ICTG-Post 18 direct worker, a new role being piloted in the service, who could support them up the age of 21, or 25 if in care (Skeels, 2024).<sup>7</sup>

Case closure analysis shows that support was provided to navigate the NRM process after transition:

*‘It was clear that direct and indirect workers helped young people and professionals to understand and navigate the post-18 NRM process, ensuring young people could remain in the NRM after moving on from the service (if they gave consent to do so).’*

Skeels, 2024:41

One of the outcome profiles for young people explored in Skeels’ (2024) study focuses on crisis and transition but does not, in this case, relate to children who have yet reached the age of 18. This is an important reminder that multiple transitions can exist in the lives of children and young people affected by modern slavery, related to different issues and recovery and support needs and at different times.

For example, Franklin (2024b) notes that the transition for children with SEND from primary to secondary education is a ‘trigger’ for disruption and potential exploitation and Grant (2023) comments on transition from a different perspective, in relation to the extensive period needed for some for recovery far beyond a transition at 18:

*‘The timeframes young people discussed often spanned several years, emphasising the importance of ensuring care experienced children’s rights to care and support post-18, including accommodation, were recognised fully in practice. This is currently still available in Scotland up age 26 under support for care experienced young people, including unaccompanied asylum-seeking and trafficked children (Ramsay, 2020; Scottish Government, 2021).’*

Franklin, 2024b:29

<sup>7</sup> This post-18 ICTG service support pilot has not led to the permanent incorporation of a post-18 role as part of the ICTG service.

Franklin (2024b) explores the transition from child to adult services, rights and responsibilities and gaps in services in relation to entitlements for support for children with SEND including young adults up to the age of 25. The study notes transition being additionally challenging for children with SEND as they may have multiple agencies to support their needs and thus may find themselves in a greater period of disruption and change. In addition, it highlights the intersection of SEND with the Mental Capacity Act (2005) and the vulnerabilities, rights and decision-making capacity of 'emerging adults' over the age of 16 and notes that this is a complex area that requires further research. Also requiring further research and exploration, Franklin notes, is understanding the transition to adult services for this group of children and young people with SEND (including the outcomes for those who do not reach the high threshold for vulnerable adult services).

For an NRM referral made before a young person's 18th birthday to continue once they turn 18, the young person must give their consent (which is not required for referral to the NRM as a child). However, there can be challenges in securing informed consent if the NRM process is not well communicated to young people and this policy can place the young person in an almost impossible position and at severe risk of further harm and exploitation as exploitation does not suddenly stop when a young person turns 18. One young person told his parent if he consented to the NRM in adulthood (which the gangs knew he had because of the protection it visibly afforded him when arrested) he would be seen as a 'grass', the risk of that for him was worse than the alternative of no longer being protected by the NRM. This young person aged 18 faced criminal proceedings within an adult system when no longer protected by the NRM and was given a custodial sentence to be served in an adult prison despite being a known victim of exploitation entered in NRM as child (Franklin, 2024b:42-43).

## Parents, carers and family

Children and young people at risk of or affected by modern slavery who are the focus of the child-focused research have diverse and dynamic family situations and experiences, for example UASC living with foster carers, in adult Home Office' hotels or local authority accommodation (with the local authority as 'corporate parent') (Hynes, 2022; Ayeb-Karlsson, 2024); asylum-seeking children and young people whose parents or primary carers are in the UK; UK-born or UK-resident children and young people including those with SEND who are looked after or care-experienced or who live with their parents/carers.

Whilst there is recognition by Hynes (2022) that 'family' is and can be understood in a broader sense, beyond the traditional one, the focus here is on parents, carers and family in a more normative sense. This area might warrant further exploration.

In Such and Aminu et al's study and consideration of 'prevention pathways' (2022), there is no mention of the role of parents and carers as these are unique



to children but have an impactful role in relation to the prevention of child modern slavery as set out below.

Celiksoy (2024) outlines several areas of focus in relation to parents/carers and families: (1) as risk or contributing to harm (2) as a protective factor (3) in aiding early identification and prevention efforts (4) in supporting recovery (5) in relation to children and young people with SEND (a focus of subsequent research from Franklin (2024b)). There is also a focus on contact with family (usually for UASC), corporate parenting and foster care.

A key **risk factor** associated with child modern slavery in the UK includes children 'not having protective family and guardians surrounding them, as well as being subject to neglect and abuse' (Celiksoy, 2024:6). Financial challenges can put added pressure on families and their resources, and this can impact on the stability and protection for children. This is also exacerbated by restricted funding for family support services, parenting programmes and family support models (Interview #21) in the wider community decreasing parents' awareness of children's vulnerability (Celiksoy, 2024:32). Children generally may also not recognise their experience as exploitation, considering it instead as 'a way to earn a living and fulfil their responsibility towards their family' (Celiksoy, 2024:23) or they can be coerced into exploitative situations based on traffickers' threats of harm to their parents (Ayeb-Karlsson, 2024). Intra-familial harm and exploitation can also occur and can be more difficult to identify (Hynes 2022; Skeels 2024), even though the focus of child protection services is considered more on the family/home (Franklin, 2024b).

In terms of protection, young people and professionals agreed that UASC accommodated in Home Office' hotels with adults were **at higher risk** of trafficking and exploitation than children placed with foster parents in their homes (Ayeb-Karlsson, 2024). In spite of this, interviews with practitioners by Celiksoy suggest training for foster carers (amongst other frontline professionals working with children and young people) as an opportunity to support early identification of human trafficking. One intervention included in this study involved training foster carers about CSE (2024:63-64).

**Preventative work** with whole families, with long-term, positive relationships can boost **protective factors** for children and reduce their risk of exploitation. This work can prevent future crises and build community relations (Celiksoy, 2024:36). Family as a potential protective factor is also noted in two further studies (Skeels, 2024; Hynes 2022). Family relationships, alongside policies and practices, are identified in literature on 'inclusion' by Hynes as being able to help young people attain stability and reduce uncertainty. (Hynes, 2022).

In relation to children with SEND, Franklin (2024a) highlights that in their previous research on modern slavery, parents/carers have asked for, not received support for SEND needs and this leads to them being more at risk of exploitation (as they become isolated, or begin to self-medicate, for example). SEND identifiers

being missed, or long waiting lists for assessments were some reasons for this. However, 'practitioners and parents were very clear that the most significant factor in keeping children and young people safe from Modern Slavery was their engagement with education services' (Franklin, 2024b). Franklin's interviews (2024b) with parents state that they also felt unsupported when seeking help because of concerns about their child's safety. For example, one parent said her concerns about online grooming were not seen as serious enough, but the parent says this was the beginning of her child's exploitation.

### **PROMISING PRACTICE: Parents of children with SEND**

Parents voices and experiences are important. Franklin (2024b) identifies that the 'signs described by parents are typically included in many tools and checklists for risk factors and signs of exploitation currently in use within local authorities, such as cannabis use'. Parents' feedback included:

- that the mental health of many children is impacted significantly by the lack of CAMHS support and responses by services to the exploitation.
- having too many agencies involved when they finally received support – one parent had 17.
- services should support family relationships. For example, there are significant issues around family relationships being threatened by exploitation and gangs who drive a wedge between the young person and their family as part of grooming, and this was not always felt to be recognised or accepted by professionals, families in the study said.
- children being exploited affected the whole family. For example, one sibling refused to make friends in case they had to move house again because of the exploitation. Gang violence against a family home was also noted.
- residential and out of area placements were challenging as they affected their relationship with their child.

Working in partnership with parents of young children with SEND was an area of focus on policy and practice in Franklin (2024b). Responding well, and responding early was shown by the evidence gathered to be dependent on three key inter-related and inter-dependent factors:

1. Parents being listened to concerning their child's (often undiagnosed/unrecognised) SEND needs.
2. Parents being listened to regarding concerns they had around their child's safety and experiences of exploitation.
3. Parents not being judged, but instead being supported and seen as protectors of their child when harm is being committed outside of the family home.

In terms of interventions reviewed by Celiksoy (2024), of the ones that provide **direct support**, one third (33%) offer family-wide support as this is seen to reduce children's vulnerability to exploitation.

On **support and recovery for families**, Grant (2023) speaks about the 16% of young people in the case files they studied who were living with **foster families**. Several young people, who lived with foster and host families, shared positive experiences in terms of their relationships with these families, practical help and feeling listened to and trusting them. Young people recognise the importance of foster carers who understand their needs as part of the positive outcomes' framework co-developed with Hynes (Outcome 11a, Hynes, 2022). Ayeb-Karlsson (2024) recommends all UASC must be 'provided with dedicated caregivers, such as trained foster carers, legally appointed parental figures or, in addition, Independent Child Trafficking Guardians, who can offer consistent support, protection, and guidance' (p. 37).

Children in two studies (Skeels, 2024; Hynes, 2022) identified as an outcome that they wanted **contact with family** (if they chose to and it was safe). Some young people may not have contact with their family because they had no family to have contact with, there was no connection, they didn't want contact or contact was not a safe option (Skeels, 2024).

Family reunification was important for some young people, including legal advice on how to pursue it (Hynes, 2022). There was one instance of the ICTG service supporting family reunification. In Hynes' report concerns around family were rooted in the 'Best Interests' of the child (Article 3 of the UNCRC).

Young people who took part in the participative study, also spoke about the future and building their own family (Hynes, 2022).

Ayeb-Karlsson (2024) explains that 'The Children and Social Work Act (2017) Section 1 requires the local authority to act as the '**corporate parent**' of children identified as 'looked after' children, requiring support under S. 20 of the Children Act' and these duties apply to UASC as they're alone in a country without the care of adult (2024:49). A case study in this research explained that in case brought against Kent Local Authority by ECPAT UK found it had acted unlawfully in accommodating newly arrived UASC in hotels and 'denying them the protection of a local authority corporate parent' (2024:20).

# How can the recommendations be grouped in different ways?

The seven children's reports funded by Modern Slavery and Human Rights PEC make 70 recommendations combined. A list of these recommendations in full, organised by report, is provided in the [Appendix](#) in this report.

In this section we explore how these recommendations might be differently organised according to (1) intended/target audience (2) system level and (3) cross-cutting theme. **Figures 1, 2 and 3** below take each of these organising frames separately to show the number and distribution of recommendations and are accompanied by analysis.

## Intended/target audience

Given that Modern Slavery and Human Rights PEC focuses on policy or legislation-related impact, most of the child-focused reports' recommendations, as would be expected, are intended for government, public or statutory bodies.

Target audiences for these policy recommendations include the UK Government (also UK Government and Scottish Government; UK Government and devolved administrations), the Home Office, Ministry of Justice, law enforcement agencies, Department for Education (and devolved equivalents), Local Safeguarding Partnerships, frontline staff working with children and young people including in schools, Local Authorities, School Leaders and the Barnardo's ICTG service (recommendations to these latter two are more practice-oriented). Some of these recommendations are directed at multiple stakeholders.

Only two of the 70 recommendations do not specify an audience.

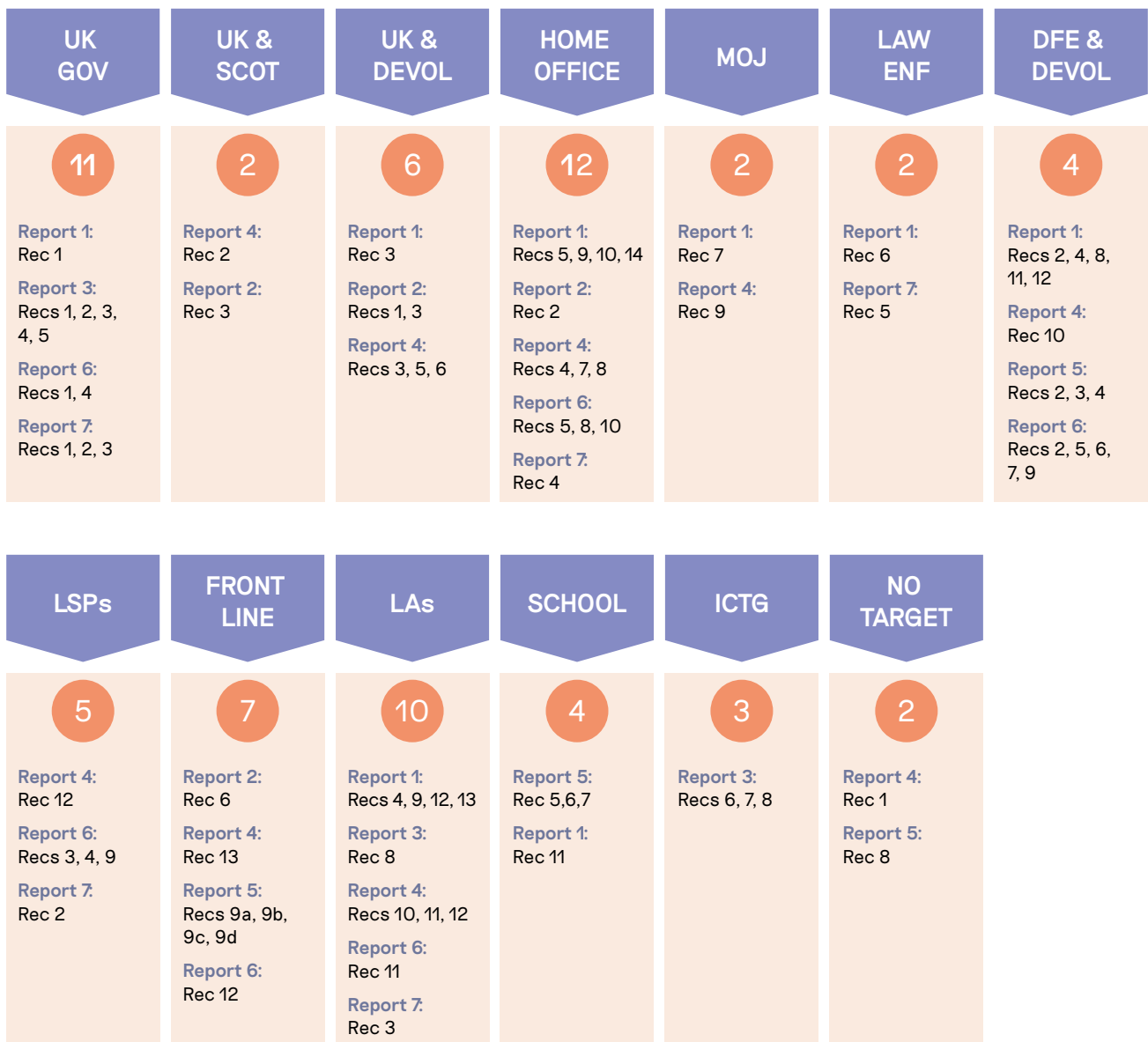
**Figure 1** shows the number of recommendations against intended / target audience. Most recommendations are for the Department for Education and its devolved equivalents (14), the Home Office (12), UK Government (11) and Local Authorities (10). This reflects the UK Government and Home Office mandate related to the Modern Slavery Act, as well as the number of reports focusing on children and young people who have migrated to the UK.

It also reflects Franklin's (2024a) focus solely on the Education sector and the important role of Local Authorities as first responders in NRM referrals as well as Children's Services and support.

UK and devolved governments, if including UK and Scottish Government, are next (8) and then frontline practitioners (7). This reflects the fact that some of the reports focus on different UK nations as well as investigate professional practice and multi-agency working.

Smaller numbers of recommendations are for the Ministry of Justice, Local Safeguarding Partnerships, law enforcement services, schools and the ICTG service. This reflects a dominant focus in the research on the immigration system compared to the criminal justice system as well as, again, a focus on professional practice in support services and schools.

**Figure 1: Number of recommendations organised by intended/target audience**



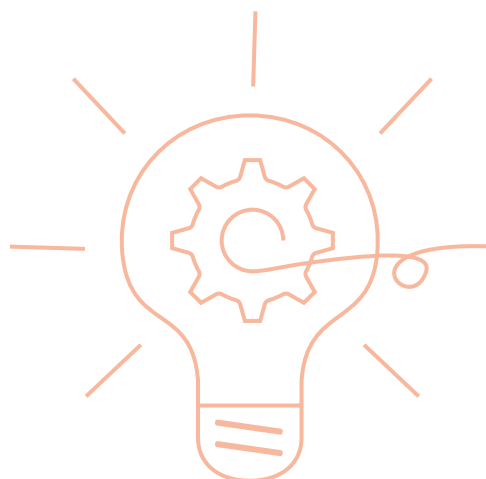
## System level

Intended audiences can be positioned in different parts of the child modern slavery prevention 'system', including, for example, at UK national/devolved government, local authority, sector and organisational levels. By categorising the recommendations in relation to the level of the system (for example, high level policy or service level), we can get a better sense of what is being recommended and the action needed as part of an inter-connecting whole. This might be useful given that one of the recommendations from the reports is for a new overarching child exploitation strategy and that findings include concerns over the lack of multi-agency working and a joined-up approach.

**Figure 2** and **Table 1** below show the number of recommendations by system level, with significant numbers focusing on policy, strategy and resourcing system levels. Targeting recommendations at the 'higher' levels of the system has the potential to give them greater buy in and traction. Due to the sole focus of Franklin's study (2024a) on Education, there is also a high number of recommendations at sector level.

The number of recommendations on guardianship reflects the two reports focusing solely on independent guardian support for trafficked young people in Scotland (Grant, 2023) and England and Wales (Skeels, 2024). Other services, interventions and practices are also a focus, given that two of the reports conducted a systematic review and scoping of existing interventions and prevention practice.

Recommendations grouped around training, awareness-raising and guidance reflect the identified need across the research for greater 'literacy' on child modern slavery amongst multiple actors including in relation to children with SEND. The limitations faced by the research have led to several recommendations around further data collection, data sharing and measurement.



**Table 1: Number of recommendations organised by 'system' level**

<p><b>Policy, Strategy and Resources (12)</b></p>	<p><b>Report 1:</b> Recommendation 1, 3  <b>Report 2:</b> Recommendation 1  <b>Report 4:</b> Recommendation 1, 2, 3  <b>Report 6:</b> Recommendation 1, 2, 3  <b>Report 7:</b> Recommendation 2, 3, 4</p>
<p><b>Statutory Systems and Procedures (Immigration, Criminal Justice and Social Care) (12)</b></p>	<p><b>Report 1:</b> Recommendation 5, 6, 9  <b>Report 2:</b> Recommendation 2  <b>Report 4:</b> Recommendation 5, 7, 8, 9, 10  <b>Report 6:</b> Recommendation 11  <b>Report 7:</b> Recommendation 1, 5</p>
<p><b>Sector Level – Education and Schools (10)</b></p>	<p><b>Report 1:</b> Recommendation 7, 8  <b>Report 5:</b> Recommendation 2, 3, 4, 5, 6  <b>Report 6:</b> Recommendation 6, 7</p>
<p><b>Services – Guardianship (7)</b></p>	<p><b>Report 1:</b> Recommendation 14  <b>Report 2:</b> Recommendation 3  <b>Report 3:</b> Recommendation 1, 2, 3, 8  <b>Report 4:</b> Recommendation 4</p>
<p><b>Other services, Interventions and Practice (15)</b></p>	<p><b>Report 1:</b> Recommendation 2, 13  <b>Report 2:</b> Recommendation 4, 5, 6  <b>Report 4:</b> Recommendation 11, 12, 13  <b>Report 5:</b> Recommendation 9a, 9b, 9c, 9d  <b>Report 6:</b> Recommendation 8, 9, 12</p>
<p><b>Training, Guidance and Awareness Raising (6)</b></p>	<p><b>Report 1:</b> Recommendation 10, 11, 12  <b>Report 5:</b> Recommendation 8  <b>Report 6:</b> Recommendation 5,10</p>
<p><b>Data collection, Sharing and Measurement (7)</b></p>	<p><b>Report 1:</b> Recommendation 4  <b>Report 3:</b> Recommendation 4, 5, 6, 7  <b>Report 4:</b> Recommendation 6  <b>Report 6:</b> Recommendation 4</p>

## Themes

Recommendations can also be grouped according to cross-cutting theme, drawing from the themes covered in this report. The themes of 'cultural competence' and 'protection and participation' account for the most recommendations. This suggests a direction of travel supporting the distinct experiences and needs of different children and young people affected by modern slavery, as well as one that forefronts children's rights and balances their protection with their right to be heard.

**Figure 3: Recommendations organised by cross-cutting themes**

<p><b>Cultural Competence</b> (20)</p>	<p><b>Report 1:</b> Recs 2,13</p> <p><b>Report 2:</b> Rec 6</p> <p><b>Report 4:</b> Rec 13</p> <p><b>Report 5:</b> Recs 2, 6, 8, 9a, 9b, 9c</p> <p><b>Report 6:</b> Recs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12</p>	<p><b>Legal advice and support</b> (2)</p>	<p><b>Report 4:</b> Recs 4, 9</p>
<p><b>Transitions</b> (4)</p>	<p><b>Report 1:</b> Rec 9</p> <p><b>Report 3:</b> Recs 5,7</p> <p><b>Report 4:</b> Rec 8</p>	<p><b>Social care</b> (3)</p>	<p><b>Report 4:</b> Recs 5,10</p> <p><b>Report 7:</b> Rec 3</p>
<p><b>Rights, protection and participation</b> (13)</p>	<p><b>Report 1:</b> Rec 14</p> <p><b>Report 2:</b> Recs 1,4</p> <p><b>Report 3:</b> Recs 1, 2, 3, 6, 8</p> <p><b>Report 4:</b> Recs 1, 2, 3, 6, 12</p>	<p><b>Missing</b> (3)</p>	<p><b>Report 6:</b> Rec 10</p> <p><b>Report 7:</b> Recs 2, 5</p>



<b>Education</b> (9)	<b>Report 1:</b> Recs 7, 8  <b>Report 2:</b> Rec 5  <b>Report 4:</b> Rec 5  <b>Report 5:</b> Recs 2, 3, 4, 6  <b>Report 6:</b> Rec 7	<b>Parents and carers</b> (1)	<b>Report 6:</b> Rec 8
<b>Awareness, Understanding and Training</b> (7)	<b>Report 1:</b> Recs 4, 10, 11, 12  <b>Report 3:</b> Rec 4  <b>Report 5:</b> Rec 8  <b>Report 6:</b> Rec 5	<b>Criminal justice</b> (1)	<b>Report 1:</b> Rec 6
<b>Accommodation</b> (5)	<b>Report 2:</b> Rec 5  <b>Report 4:</b> Rec 11  <b>Report 6:</b> Rec 11  <b>Report 7:</b> Recs 1, 4	<b>Legal advice and support</b> (2)	<b>Report 4:</b> Recs 4, 9
<b>Trusted adults</b> (5)	<b>Report 2:</b> Rec 3  <b>Report 4:</b> Rec12  <b>Report 5:</b> Recs 5, 6, 9d	<b>Mental Health</b> (3)	<b>Report 4:</b> Recs 7, 11  <b>Report 2:</b> Rec 5
<b>Immigration</b> (3)	<b>Report 1:</b> Rec 5  <b>Report 2:</b> Rec 2  <b>Report 4:</b> Rec 5		

## Key takeaways and recommendations

- Evidence from the portfolio indicates a lack of opportunities for children at risk of exploitation before any harm occurs and at the early stages of exploitation to share their experiences, concerns and views, although guardianship support services for children and young people affected by human trafficking are demonstrated as participatory. There's potential for 'opening conversations' with children and young people for early identification purposes in education settings and beyond.

**Recommendation: future participatory research investigates how to enable children at risk of exploitation to share their experiences, views and concerns across multiple sectors and sites before harm occurs.**

- The research portfolio analysed provides evidence of the unique importance of a relationship with a trusted adult for children and young people at risk of or affected by exploitation and for the prevention of exploitation, re-exploitation and support for recovery. It is a critical part of the prevention pathway for children. The role of the trusted adult is being met for certain children by independent guardianship services in Scotland, England and Wales.

**Recommendation: that the ICTG service is rolled out across the whole of England.**

- A 'cultural competence' lens can be productively applied to Modern Slavery PEC's funded research on children to explore the differential identification of, and prevention and response to, child modern slavery.

**Recommendation: a cultural competency focus should be cross-cutting for future funded research, particularly for any service evaluation related to children at risk of or affected by modern slavery.**

- A review of the Modern Slavery and Human Rights PEC funded research on children reveals evidence on mental health related to risk, the identification and prevention of modern slavery as well as recovery and support.

- Children at risk of and affected by modern slavery are often navigating complex statutory systems, such as those related to social care, criminal justice and immigration which can sometimes create additional risk of exploitation. These systems relate to access to rights and essential services and impact on children and young people's power and control over their own lives. The lack of 'literacy' around child modern slavery of professionals working within these systems is also a risk.

**Recommendation: further exploration is needed of *what works* in terms of effectively raising awareness of professionals working with and around children at risk of or affected by modern slavery.**

- Children and young people's navigation of the UK immigration and asylum system, including waiting for documentation and status, creates additional stressors and 'system trauma'.
- Children and young people at risk of or affected by modern slavery need good quality, independent legal advice and support including those with SEND facing school exclusion and children who are part of the National Transfer Scheme.
- Going missing is an important 'red flag' for the prevention of child modern slavery. Numbers of children and young people suspected or identified as affected by human trafficking going missing from care and accommodation are significant, with children with SEND, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and looked after children particularly vulnerable to going missing. Missing episodes can continue to occur when children are accessing guardianship support services.

**Recommendation: further and detailed research into the causes of and mitigating actions related to children going missing is required.**

- The transition to adulthood or to adult services (and any related support service exit) can make young survivors of modern slavery more vulnerable and at risk of re-exploitation as well as present barriers to their further development and positive outcomes.
- There is not one but multiple transitions in the lives of children and young people affected by modern slavery, related, for example, to changing circumstances (for example, the move from primary to secondary school), newly emerging risks and evolving needs at different times. Support services need to be adaptive, flexible and responsive as a result.
- Evidence shows that recovery and related support needs can continue well beyond the transition to adulthood at 18 suggesting a longer timeframe is important for achieving positive outcomes and full recovery and support.

**Recommendation: a focus on support and positive outcomes for children through and beyond transition is critical.**

- Children and young people at risk or affected by modern slavery who are the focus of the child-focused research have diverse and dynamic family situations and experiences.
- Recommendation: a focus beyond the 'traditional' and normative notion of family in this context might be further explored.**
- The role of parents and carers is unique to children and child modern slavery, varied in nature and impact.

**Recommendation: this requires further exploration in relation to the prevention of child exploitation at different stages, with parents and carers increasingly engaged as participants in research.**

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# Appendix

## List of recommendations from the research portfolio on children

### Celiksoy (2024) – 14 recommendations

1. The UK Government must ensure that all departments in central, devolved and local governments have sufficient funding and resources to address and effectively respond to modern slavery of children and young people. In particular, local authority children services must be sufficiently resourced to implement preventative services and effective interventions.
2. The Department for Education, other relevant bodies of devolved administrations, and local authorities should develop and implement early intervention programmes with adequate support provision based on inclusive models and holistic approaches that account for the diverse needs of children and young people vulnerable to modern slavery.
3. The UK Government, in collaboration with devolved administrations, relevant government departments, and civil society, must develop a UK-wide evidence-based, time-bound, child exploitation strategy.
4. The Department for Education, other relevant bodies of devolved administrations, and local authorities should improve data collection and disaggregation on all forms of child exploitation, including by creating a standardised system for collection, storage, and reporting of information from local authority children's services.
5. The Home Office must ensure that immigration enforcement functions do not increase the risk of modern slavery for children and young people. This includes, but is not limited to, the implementation of the Nationality and Borders Act 2022 and Illegal Migration Act 2023, as well as immigration and asylum procedures and political rhetoric.
6. Law enforcement agencies must ensure that potential child victims are identified as such, not treated as offenders, and do not face criminal charges as a result of their exploitation.
7. The Ministry of Justice must ensure that legal aid provision is extended to school exclusion appeals as a means to reduce vulnerability for recruitment into exploitation.

8. The Department for Education and other relevant bodies of devolved administrations must ensure that education is promoted as a crucial preventative measure, and a vehicle for early identification of children and young people.
9. Local authorities must ensure that child victims transitioning into adulthood, particularly those with irregular immigration status, receive specialist modern slavery support as part of their entitlement as care leavers. The Home Office must ensure that child victims, who are not former looked after children, access quality support through the NRM when transitioning into adulthood, providing them with the necessary services and support to meet their needs at this crucial stage.
10. The Home Office must provide sufficient resources to ensure that all first responders have mandatory, continuous and consistent training on child modern slavery. Consideration should be given to extend the training framework to other public agencies that are likely to encounter child victims, including professionals working in education and healthcare.
11. The Department for Education and other relevant bodies of devolved administrations must provide specific training on child modern slavery to professionals within children services who have duties and obligations on child protection.
12. The Department for Education, other relevant bodies of devolved administrations, and local authorities should work on awareness raising campaigns to inform the general public and children and young people about child modern slavery, tailored for the different audiences and supported by evidence of effectiveness.
13. Local authorities should conduct proactive outreach and tailor interventions to ensure they are accessible to marginalised families and communities and ensure their involvement in child protection initiatives.
14. The Home Office must immediately roll out the Independent Child Trafficking Guardianship Service to all remaining local authorities in England and Wales

## Grant (2023) – 6 recommendations

1. The UK and Scottish Governments must ensure that a child protection framework of support and processes take priority over NRM referrals. OSCE (2022)<sup>1</sup> indicate that any NRM should build on existing national child protection systems, where a child's best interest is at the centre of decision making in line with state obligations under the UNCRC. Improving survivor-informed support for separated children and young people in Scotland who have been trafficked.
2. The Home Office must ensure that decision making processes are timely. Immigration status is crucial in allowing young people to make plans and organise their lives. Ensuring decision making is timely is imperative to recovery.
3. The Scottish Government and other funding bodies need to ensure that services are properly resourced to provide adequate and appropriate levels of support. Limited provisions work against building trusting relationships and can often impact on the effectiveness of engagement and subsequently longer-term outcomes for young people. Continuity and consistency are vital in establishing trusting relationships as a pre-condition for recovery. The Scottish model of guardianship support for all separated children, regardless of NRM decisions, combined with provision of support post-18 for care experienced young people, provides this. Identification and support in Scotland is not conditional on a positive NRM decision and reflects the importance of the child protection and support framework and process as indicated in the first recommendation.
4. Clear collaborative objectives that over-ride the organisational priorities of any one agency need to be reinforced.
5. Young people require support – including education, financial, accommodation and mental health support – that goes beyond specific services related to trafficking in order to meet their longer-term needs and support longer-term recovery. These are presently available in Scotland under child-care and throughcare and aftercare provisions and professionals need to ensure equal access to services across the country, supported by additional training where necessary.
6. All statutory and non-statutory bodies working with separated and trafficked children need to ensure that the focus remains on children's needs rather than particular national groups. Professionals have ongoing concerns about the patterns of over-representation of specific nationalities in processes of identification. Ongoing training regarding patterns of arrivals, the importance of assessment within a child protection framework utilising possible trafficking indicators, and the need for a multiagency response (including cross border) are all important factors regarding the focus on needs.



## Skeels (2024) – 8 recommendations

### To the UK Government:

1. Extend the ICTG service to the whole of England and Wales, based on the evidence of how it supports the attainment of positive outcomes for children and young people affected by modern slavery, formally commence Section 48 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 and draft and adopt the regulations that sit beneath this.
2. Include meaningful children's participation in any commissioned evaluation or research on the ICTG service where safe and appropriate to do so, including in defining the outcomes that matter to them.
3. Maintain and encourage a dynamic, responsive and needs-led ICTG service. This will allow the service to continue to respond to the dynamic landscape and policy context of child modern slavery in England and Wales
4. Draw routinely on the intelligence of ICTG service practitioners coordinated through established intelligence mechanisms and routes, for example the regional anti-slavery partnerships
5. Investigate secure data sharing and data linkage to measure post-service outcomes within a Trusted Research Environment and its legal feasibility in relation to data protection regulations, privacy notices and any other governance around data sharing.

### To Barnardo's ICTG service:

6. Develop a participatory, holistic outcomes measurement tool: The ICTG service should develop a suitable participatory, holistic assessment and outcomes measurement tool for the service, based on the meaningful participation of children and young people, to effectively and fully measure and report on outcomes for children and young people supported by the ICTG service.
7. Routinely record outstanding concerns at point of transition: The ICTG service should systematically record issues of concern and barriers faced by children and young people at the point of transition to better understand the challenges facing the ICTG service in enabling positive outcomes for children and young people prior to service exit, including for those who are 'aging out' of the support provided and to inform future service development.
8. Establish or continue to support a 'young researchers' group for the service: The ICTG service should seek resources and funding to establish or provide ongoing support to a 'young researchers' group that will enable the meaningful participation of children and young people affected by modern slavery and supported by the service in any future evaluations or research.

## Hynes (2022) – 13 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.
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 must ensure that child victims of trafficking are always treated as children first and afforded their rights to the protection and care they need.
4. The UK Government and devolved administrations must ensure children identified as potential victims of slavery and trafficking are promptly assigned an independent legal guardian.
5. The UK Government and devolved administrations must commit to supporting positive outcomes for child victims in care, education, immigration as well as measuring the impact towards positive outcomes of the National Referral Mechanism.
6. 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.
7. The Home Office must ensure the immigration and asylum system does not re-traumatise children.
8. 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.
9. The Ministry of Justice must ensure all child victims can access a solicitor who has the expertise to properly represent them in the complex areas of immigration, criminal justice, child welfare and protection law.
10. Local authority children's services with the full support of the Department for Education and equivalents in the devolved administrations must provide quality care for migrant child victims to ensure they are afforded specialist support and the same opportunities as other young people.

11. Local authority children's services must enable psychological and physical recovery for child victims, particularly in the provision of safe accommodation and access to mental health services.
12. Statutory chief officers and safeguarding partners in each local authority area must ensure they develop relationship-based practice that builds trust with children as a fundamental measure to their ability to have their voices heard and for them to feel safe.
13. 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

## Franklin (2024a) – 9 recommendations

### National government:

1. All recommendations below indicate an urgent need for joined up government policy and approaches to modern slavery and harm to children and young people with SEND, more inclusive educational policy and an urgent need for implementation of improved support for children and young people with SEND. This would support school leadership to implement the recommendations within their settings.
2. The Department for Education need to support school leaders to have the resources, scope and guidance to create more inclusive, open spaces conducive to creating cultures of conversations which create important sites for early help and preventative intervention to address child exploitation.
3. The Department for Education needs to reduce the use of restrictive practices such as isolation through updated guidance of Reducing the need for restraint and restrictive intervention (2019) and its extension to mainstream educational settings.
4. The Department for Education needs to recognise that exclusion is a safeguarding concern and requires a multi-agency response, recognising that prevention via inclusive school policies is a protective factor.

## School Leadership:

5. School leadership needs to support the development of 'cultures of conversations' within their school through creating a flexible environment for time, spaces and places to facilitate trust and opening up of conversations between all school staff and pupils.
6. School leaders need to support teaching and other staff in their settings to eliminate punitive disciplinary approaches, isolation and exclusions. Policies need to be based around understanding individual pupils and making sense of behaviour as communication, and often a demonstration of unmet needs.
7. Schools should develop individual 'wellbeing/safety' plans with all pupils which identify a staff member of the child's choice, and an accessible way to approach them if they need to speak to someone. Through anonymised mechanisms seek pupil voice to understand their experiences of school culture and of trusted relationships within the school.
8. School leadership needs to implement training for all staff across their school to raise awareness and understanding of modern slavery, exploitation, and SEND to support identification of early indicators and flags for concern. This needs to be accompanied by a culture where staff can discuss and reflect and feel supported to be professionally curious.
9. Staff across the children's sector need to:
  - a. Recognise behaviour as communication, be prepared to listen to all forms of communication, and open up conversations. Put simply, ask children and young people how they are? What they may need? Be interested in their lives so that they feel valued.
  - b. Notice changes in children and young people even subtle changes, this requires genuinely knowing a child. Recognise that its ok not to be sure, but it is always important to talk to other colleagues about how a child with SEND is presenting.
  - c. Approach children and young people, and not expect them to seek out help or disclose. Staff also need to reflect on the time and place when they approach a young person – is it a safe, accessible environment?
  - d. Be aware of their own facial expressions, language and choice of words, manner, approachability, and recognise regardless of role that they may, or may not be, the right trusted person that an individual child might need – who does the child trust?

## Franklin (2024b) – 12 recommendations

1. All indicate an urgent need for joined up government policy and approaches to Modern Slavery and harm of children and young people with SEND, with an urgent need for implementation of improved support for this group.
2. The Department for Education should update the Safeguarding Disabled Children and Young People Guidance: The Department for Education should commission and publish renewed multi-agency practice guidance to replace the out of date: Safeguarding Disabled Children and Young People Guidance (2009). This would bring it into line with new evidence, emerging innovative practice and updated guidance across all other areas of harm including Modern Slavery. This would support training, highlight key legal and policy issues such as mental capacity, duties under the Equality Act (2010) including the need for reasonable adjustments, transition planning to adult services and provide good practice examples. As demonstrated current guidance does not provide specificity nor direction for improved practice, targeted guidance could draw attention to the need for improved assessment that includes cumulative and overlapping trauma, whole family support and a strengths-based approach based on understanding of SEND.
3. Implementation of Safeguarding Children with SEND champions. Local Safeguarding Partnerships should be tasked to identify a champion for safeguarding children and adults with SEND in their area to ensure scrutiny and analysis to reduce risks of Modern Slavery. Their remit should include urgent work to audit and review Modern Slavery training and prevention work and assess local service provision for children and young people with SEND who are exploited to ensure availability of appropriate responses for this group to avoid continued risk and harm.
4. The UK government should improve information sharing and data collection that helps agencies understand prevalence and nature of SEND on children and young adults' safeguarding needs. Local Safeguarding Partnerships need to audit the quality of information sharing across all agencies within referrals and assessments to ensure appropriate reference to a child or young person's SEND and to include information to ensure that reasonable adjustments to working with the child to meet their needs are recorded. Specific and urgent requirements are needed to ensure that the NRM referral process allows SEND to be recorded and a narrative description required to understand needs is added to the form. This would enable the Home Office to be able to report national statistics on NRM numbers of children and young people with SEND (a protected characteristic under the Equality Act, 2010), and aid better understanding of prevalence and required resource allocation. Similarly, DfE Children in Need statistics which record cases of child criminal and child sexual exploitation should also capture whether children have SEND to enable more sophisticated understanding of prevalence. Improved information

sharing is also required across LAs and Police forces to ensure that when a child is placed (or picked up) in another area that information regarding their vulnerability and SEND needs travels with them.

5. The Home Office and DfE should jointly commission and roll out national multi-agency mandatory training across all services to address lack of understanding of Modern Slavery and SEND amongst frontline workers, teachers, and managers across statutory and voluntary sectors. Given the nuanced understanding required, and the need for many multi-agency practitioners to adapt their practice and approach towards special educational needs, disability and vulnerability to harm, training should be mandatory and wherever possible face-to-face to enable full discussion and constructive challenge to some currently held beliefs and practice. This should also include those involved as first responders and decision-makers within the NRM.
6. The Department for Education should support the Earlier identification of SEND and support to meet needs through multi agency working. The established links between increased risks of harm and unmet or unidentified SEND needs requires concerted attention through earlier identification and support to reduce challenges faced in education which lead to exclusion and isolation; this needs urgent attention from DfE. This requires quicker access to, and availability of, key services to support children and their families when risk is first identified. Although the SEND reforms promise some increased resources, without a multi-agency focus which also provides a safeguarding lens, opportunities to reduce risk and respond to harm will be missed. This requires improved multi-agency working and partnership with parents to identify and respond to early concerns around SEND and should be reflected in updated safeguarding guidance.
7. The Department for Education should lead multi-agency work to prevent of school breakdowns and establish accountable safeguarding processes for young people with SEND. Urgent multi-agency work, led by DfE, is needed to set up a specific set of resourced actions required nationally by all strategic partners to work together in order to prevent breakdowns at school leading to increased risks of harm for children and young people with SEND when placed in PRUs, Alternative Provision or outside of education. This requires multi-agency working to ensure that there is quality and targeted prevention work including resourced support within EHCPs, and for those children without EHCPs but who may be at risk. Specific work is needed to locate and work with all off-rolled, excluded, home-school and persistently absent children with SEND to ensure they receive their right to an education and are adequately safeguarded. This should be seen as part of disruptive measures to prevent exploitation and trafficking.

8. The Home Office and Department for Education should support local safeguarding partnerships to Working with parents as a resource for protection and to fund and produce resources to support parents. Local safeguarding partnerships should lead a change in practice to seeking to work with parents of children and young people with SEND as a resource for protection, and review with parents how agencies within their area work with and respond to parents in partnership; and address a failure in some parts to listen effectively to parents. This requires a lead agency to aid communication and approach and accountability. In addition, parents and their children should be provided with accessible information which highlights risk of and promotes understanding of Modern Slavery. For children and young people this should be appropriate to age and understanding.
9. 9. Local Safeguarding Partnerships should undertake an urgent review of how risk is assessed in children and young people with SEND. Practice within multi-agency service hubs (MASH) and duty social work systems needs to be urgently reviewed by all Local Safeguarding Partnerships with respect to how risks are assessed when a child or young person has SEND. This is required to improve understanding of patterns of cumulative harms, unmet needs and layers of trauma, use of chronologies, and hearing the concerns of multi-agencies and parents when children are at risk of or being exploited. This should have ongoing monitoring by the champion recommended at local safeguarding partnership board level.
10. The Department for Education and the Home Office should update guidance and develop training to support improved practice concerning missing children and young people with SEND. There needs to be recognition within national guidance of the increased risks for children and young people with SEND when they go missing, and the need for early intervention and improved communication across multi agencies to minimise harm to missing children and young people. Improved return interviews are required which take into account a child or young person's SEND needs and make necessary adaptations to ensure that children and young people can fully participate – this requires training for those conducting the interviews and a multi-agency approach. There is an urgent need for cumulative risk for this group of children to be taken into account when missing incidents are reported and recorded.
11. Local Authorities should reduce distant out of authority placements and their breakdown as a response to exploitation and trafficking. Alongside a review of local service responses, out of area placements for children and young people with SEND who are exploited outside of the family needs to be reviewed, and as far as possible moves should be kept to a minimum and be subject to good, ongoing planning and Independent Review Officer scrutiny to ensure safety nets are not fractured. No child should be placed at a long distance from home and specifically not in unregulated accommodation where needs associated with SEND and with risk of exploitation are not supported and monitored.

Rather than removing a child from their family or community emphasis should be placed on prevention, disruption and prosecution of offenders.

12. Practitioners should improve understanding of communication and behaviours of children and young people with SEND. Data collected identified many situations where children have shown or indicated through their 'behaviour' that their needs were not being met, and/or that they were experiencing exploitation and/or trafficking. Listening to children and young people's communication is required at all stages when working with any child, however, training and improved understanding is required when working with children who may communicate, present, or behave in what may be seen as an 'atypical' manner. Greater efforts are needed to build and maintain relationship-based practice with a stable multi-agency workforce. Misconceptions such as relying solely on a child to disclose, and/or as a means to access support needs to be challenged.

## Ayeb-Karlsson (2024) – 5 key recommendations

1. The UK government and relevant ministries and departments must work together to ensure appropriate safeguarding measures are implemented in the accommodation of children and young people identified as being at risk of trafficking including sufficient resourced and specialist trained accommodation and support staff (social workers, health worker and teachers).
2. The UK government must commit to an independent inquiry into the disappearance of children from Home Office' hotels and an extensive plan of how to find and support those children and young adults who remain missing.
3. The UK government must ensure local authorities children's services have sufficient funding to provide quality care and support to all unaccompanied children seeking asylum and commit to only determine someone is an adult in exceptional circumstances.
4. The Home Office must not commence the provision to accommodate unaccompanied children in the Illegal Migration Act 2023.
5. Police forces must investigate the disappearance of all missing children equally (whether British or an unaccompanied child seeking asylum) as well as potential incidents of human trafficking and exploitation.



# MODERN SLAVERY & HUMAN RIGHTS

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