

Press release

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## **With shocking numbers of trafficked children disappearing from care, new report shows way to keep them safe**

- System failing trafficked children as up to 60% go missing within hours of being found\*
- Local authorities and other care services routinely unable to identify signs of trafficking and failing to share information
- Cost considerations behind poor care decisions
- Alternative pilot scheme results in no children going missing - and saves money too

**A new report from anti-slavery charity Unseen has hit out at current provision for child victims of trafficking in the UK, saying systemic failings in the care system, poor training and cost cutting are contributing to a shocking number of trafficked children disappearing from care.**

The report describes how up to 60% of trafficked children go missing from children's homes within hours of being found by the authorities.\*

It details a successful alternative accommodation-plus-support model, which was developed and trialled by the charity in 2017-18, and recommends the findings of the scheme are used to rethink care for trafficked children. Importantly, during the trial, no children went missing.

Says Kate Garbers, Director at Unseen and author of the report: "We need to tackle the fact that for too long we have been OK with trafficked children going missing from a system that is supposed to protect them.

"This report comes as new evidence has emerged that the coronavirus pandemic has only made the situation worse for trafficked children.\*\*

"This innovative scheme combined the care and nurture of a family environment with the high levels of supervision and risk management of a registered children's home, plus the additional security of a safehouse with specially trained staff."

The report highlights how cost considerations are playing too prominent a part in decision making.

“Our pilot highlighted some of the systemic issues with the way decisions are made about referrals and placements, and have led us to question if best interest decisions not only consider the child, but also the cost of a placement,” says Kate Garbers.

In fact, implementing Unseen’s model, where fewer if any children go missing from care, could save millions of pounds, with the current cost of every missing persons case being between £1,325 and £2,145.

Key recommendations from the report, entitled Missing Home, centre around five core themes:

1. Trafficked children have specific needs, and specialised services to prevent them going missing, particularly in the first 72 hours, should be available to them.
2. Training on trafficking and appropriate placements for trafficked children should be provided to relevant statutory agencies, especially local authority commissioning and placing teams.
3. The best interests of the child should be at the centre of all referral decisions, irrespective of initial cost implications.
4. Specialised residential support services for trafficked children should be centrally developed, commissioned, mandated and part-funded on a per-region basis.
5. Utilising police orders, which enable the police protect a child and find alternative accommodation for them, should be standard practice when a trafficked child is found. This will enable police to be more involved in placement decisions and allow access to appropriate services for potentially trafficked children.

## **Notes to editors**

### **More information**

Download a full copy of the report at:

[https://www.unseenuk.org/resources/unseen\\_childrens\\_report.pdf](https://www.unseenuk.org/resources/unseen_childrens_report.pdf)

**For all press enquiries contact: 0303 040 2888 [media@unseenuk.org](mailto:media@unseenuk.org)**

## **Expert interviews**

Quotes and interviews available with Andrew Wallis, Unseen CEO, and Kate Garbers, Director of Unseen.

## **Number of children being trafficked**

- The numbers of children identified as potential victims of trafficking and slavery in the UK is rising year on year. In 2018, 3,137 children were identified.
- This figure represents a 48% increase on the previous year and nearly half of the total number of referrals for adults *and* children to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), the official system by which victims of modern slavery are identified.
- The most common form of exploitation experienced was forced labour (63%), followed by sexual exploitation (20%), domestic servitude (3%), and organ harvesting (1%).

## **Unseen's children's safehouse pilot**

- Between December 2017 and December 2018, Unseen ran the UK's first Ofsted registered children's home for non-UK national children who have experienced trafficking.
- Four children who had experienced trafficking were housed during the course of the project and went on to successful placements in mainstream care.
- The model we developed was a completely new and innovative approach. It combined the consistency, boundaries, care and nurture of a family environment with the high levels of supervision and risk management of a registered children's home, plus the additional security features of a safehouse, with staff trained to support trafficked children.
- The Ofsted-registered project was set up as a pilot and supported by the Home Office, to look out ways to rethink how the UK supports children who have experienced trafficking, specifically looking at reducing the numbers that go missing from care.

## **About Unseen**

Unseen is working towards a world without slavery. We provide safehouses and support in the community for survivors of trafficking and modern slavery. We also run the Modern Slavery and Exploitation Helpline, and work with communities, business, governments, other charities and statutory agencies, such as the police and NHS, to stamp out slavery for good.

**[www.unseenuk.org](http://www.unseenuk.org)**

\* Beddoe, C. 2007. Missing Out: A Study of Child Trafficking in the North West and East Midlands. London: ECPAT UK & Save The Children.  
<https://www.antislaverycommissioner.co.uk/media/1255/heading-back-to-harm.pdf>

\* \* <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/jun/06/alarmed-rise-in-cases-of-missing-children-following-safeguarding-cuts>