

# action briefing

today's fight for tomorrow's freedom

## Trafficking in the UK

### Scale of trafficking in the UK

The Government estimates there are 5000 people trafficked at any one time. Between April 2009 and March 2010, 706 potential cases of human trafficking were referred to the body responsible for formal identification (National Referral Mechanism). They came from a total of 61 countries. The largest source countries were Nigeria, China, and Vietnam followed by the UK and other EU states. Just over a quarter were under the age of 18. A third were potential cases of trafficking for forced labour and two-thirds for sexual exploitation.

### Current protection for trafficked victims

The Government adopted the Council of Europe *Convention on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings* in April 2009. The Convention requires the UK to guarantee minimum standards of protection and support to trafficked people. Measures include:

- a mechanism to accurately and fairly identify trafficked people.
- access to specialist services including counselling and safe housing
- access to redress, including compensation

### How is the UK failing trafficked people?

A new report released in June 2010 by the Anti-Trafficking Monitoring Group, of which Anti-Slavery International is a member, has shed light on the repeated failures of the Government to meet its obligations under the Convention.

The report criticises the identification system for trafficked people as 'not fit for purpose', exposing differential treatment of victims depending on their immigration status. 76% of UK nationals referred were positively identified as having been trafficked contrasted with 29% of EU nationals and 12% of non-EU nationals (despite them representing the largest proportion of victims). Whether intentionally or not, the system appears to be putting too much emphasis on where the trafficked person is from rather than prioritising their support needs as a victim of a crime.



Karen Robinson/Panos Pictures

**Jiera (19, Lithuanian) was a victim of human trafficking. "My life has been ruined by two men I thought were my friends. They trafficked me into prostitution when I was 17." She has taken refuge in drink and drugs.**

### What is trafficking?

**Trafficking involves transporting people away from the communities in which they live, through the use of violence, deception or coercion, for the purpose of their exploitation. When children are trafficked, no violence, deception or coercion needs to be involved. Simply transporting them into exploitative conditions constitutes trafficking.**

**Because of its hidden nature, accurate statistics on the numbers involved across the world are hard to come by. The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that at any one time at least 2.4 million people have been trafficked and are being subjected to sexual or labour exploitation around the world.**

Failures within the identification process compounded by a lack of resources for support services have resulted in barriers to those trafficked accessing the services they are entitled to. The report found that space in suitable accommodation is not always available. No accommodation was found to be available for trafficked men despite them representing 26% of all referrals.

Evidence also shows that current measures have not improved the rate of trafficking convictions in the UK, and in some cases they actively undermine prosecutions. Without access to specialised services coupled with an effective reflection period, the current system will only continue to hinder the recovery of those trafficked from their trauma. Measures need to increase the likelihood they will trust and cooperate with law-enforcement agencies and speak out against their traffickers in order to contribute to the UK's fight against a thriving and profitable criminal industry of human exploitation.

The report found that trafficked people continue to be treated as criminals rather than the victims of a serious crime, including children trafficked to work in cannabis 'factories', which can often result in their arrest, prosecution and imprisonment. In some cases victims were repeatedly not identified as victims of trafficking and were consequently found culpable for offences committed whilst subject to abuse and coercion.

The report also highlights the UK's failure to protect trafficked children. Although a strong child protection framework exists in the UK, the current referral system by-passes those with child protection expertise taking the decision as to whether a child has been trafficked out of their hands and leaving many children without a legal guardian to uphold their best interests.

## Gheeta's experience under the current system

Gheeta from India was trafficked into forced labour in England by a family friend based in the UK, where she was terrorised for four years. "He expected me to do all the housework for him as well as cook for him everyday. He would shout at me if I made mistakes. Before long he started to hit me too."

She was forced to work at a local shop for 80 hours a week and give all her earnings to her trafficker. "Things got really bad after I found out my father had died. He told me that he could do anything he wanted to me now because there was no one to look after me. That's when he started raping me. I tried to fight back but he threatened to stab me with a knife. Once when I tried to stop him he said he would kill me, chop me up and send the pieces to the family."

Gheeta was not recognised as trafficked – the arguments in her refusal letter said they doubted her claim to be coerced or exploited because she didn't try and escape even though she had a television in the flat, held the key to the flat, went out for grocery shopping once every two months and was allowed to leave the flat to work. The refusal letter also said that while her frequent rape was "extremely unpleasant" it did not amount to trafficking because it was "triggered by your father's death", after which time they accepted that the trafficker felt he could then act with impunity.

## What you can do:

The Government must recognise the very real impact and devastation trafficking has on the individual lives of the men, women and children involved, and successfully follow through on its commitments under the Convention to ensure that victims of trafficking receive the support and treatment they are entitled to.

Please write politely worded letters to the Home Secretary Theresa May MP:

- Welcome the progress made by the Government so far in tackling human trafficking, particularly the adoption of the Council of Europe *Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings*.
- Express your concern that although trafficked people are entitled to specialised support and protection under the Convention, in practice many obstacles remain in enabling them to access these rights.
- State that these failures significantly hinder the recovery of victims from the psychological, physical and social consequences of their ordeal, alongside curtailing the fight by law-enforcement agencies to bring the perpetrators of these crimes to justice.
- Urge the Government to recognise the immediate need to: reform the identification process by adopting a multi-agency approach to decision-making; ensure those trafficked are referred to appropriate support services and increase resourcing for these services; appoint an independent anti-trafficking watchdog to oversee anti-trafficking measures in the UK, and ensure no victims of trafficking are prosecuted for crimes they committed while under coercion.

Please also write to your MP and ask him or her to raise your concerns with the Home Secretary about this issue.

## Please write to:

Rt Hon Theresa May MP  
Home Secretary  
The Home Office  
2 Marsham Street  
London SW1 4DP

MP  
House of Commons  
London SW1A 0AA

Switchboard tel: +44 (0) 20 7219 3000

Fax: +44 (0)20 7035 4745

Email via the website: [www.theyworkforyou.com](http://www.theyworkforyou.com)

Salutation: Dear Home Secretary