

## How do I identify a person who has been trafficked and/or is being exploited?

Extract from a presentation by Alison Harvey, General Secretary Immigration Law Practitioners' Association (ILPA) to the North-South Immigration Forum, 9 July 2008.

All too often, the answer is “with great difficulty”<sup>1</sup>. One question to ask is – is anyone controlling the actions of this person? However, in the case of children you can answer that one in the affirmative for most children who are with a parent or guardian, or relying on a friend.

Another question to ask is – is this person afraid of someone? However, for most refugees, and indeed many people under immigration control under immigration control, the answer to that question is yes, without their having any involvement in trafficking.

Think domestic violence and child protection, and all the factors that might lead you to ask whether a person is being abused. In particular, those familiar with organised crime against children, paedophile rings, people using gangs of children to steal or do difficult work, can draw on that experience. In addition, the following factors have been of assistance:

- Profiles of those being trafficked. Knowledge is scanty, but some trafficking source countries (and towns); traffickers; trafficking routes, contacts in the UK and destinations are known. See further reading at end. Knowledge of these may help you to identify children who may have been trafficked. In some cases there will be distinctive evidence: particular scarring, or juju charms. However, they are only a partial guide: trafficking methods change frequently, and just because a person does not fit a known profile, does not mean that they have not been trafficked.
- Think outside stereotypical situations. It is not only women who are trafficked, and trafficking is not solely for the purposes of sexual exploitation.
- People who stick to a wildly improbable and clearly untrue story about their journey, have a reason for not telling the truth. One possible reason is that they have been trafficked.
- People who say they have just arrived, but appear to know English expressions or habits, suggesting to you that they may have been here longer, may have a reason for this. One possible reason is that they have been trafficked.
- People whose documents have been confiscated (other than those whose documents are held by the authorities)
- In known cases of trafficking, people have entered countries with mobile phone numbers on them, or known to them, or social services have been contacted by third parties claiming to be legal representatives, shortly after arrival.

A concern that a person may have been trafficked is most likely to be confirmed by the person's disclosure. In other cases, disclosure will be your first hint that a person has

---

<sup>1</sup> See *What the professionals know: the trafficking of children into and through the UK for sexual purposes* C.Somerset, ECPAT UK, 2001 and *Cause for Concern? London Social Services and Child Trafficking* Carron Somerset ECPAT UK, March 2004, which found social workers lacking in information, training and resources: suspecting trafficking was taking place, but unable to get to the bottom of this or to respond.

been trafficked. Therefore the most important means of identifying people who have been trafficked, are actions taken to facilitate disclosure. A few key reminders of such actions:

- A relationship of trust;
- Clear information about policies on confidentiality;
- Confidentiality in practice;
- Opportunities to express concerns. This is particularly important when a person communicates through an interpreter. The interpreter may be involved in the trafficking, or his/her discretion may not be trusted, or the person may be afraid of humiliation etc., in disclosing his/her actions through an interpreter.

Just because a person is involved in prostitution, or working illegally, does not mean that s/he has been trafficked. Refugees and migrants may find it difficult to survive and employ risky survival strategies that leave them vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Many similar considerations as apply to work with trafficked people apply in these cases, but they are not trafficking cases.