

**Response to the inquiry into the situation of unaccompanied and separated minors in Europe**

**(Rt Hon Fiona Mactaggart and Baroness Butler-Sloss / The Human Trafficking Foundation)**

**May 2017**

- Barnardo's is the largest children's charity in the UK, with a strong history of supporting and advocating on behalf of vulnerable children. We welcome the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry into the situation of unaccompanied and separated minors in Europe. In particular, this response addresses the actions that are required to better protect children from the risks of trafficking and exploitation; and the ability and willingness of local authorities to accept more unaccompanied minors, by highlighting Northern Ireland's capacity and abilities in this regard and demonstrating our commitment to supporting and implementing this.
- Barnardo's works with vulnerable children includes supporting unaccompanied and separated children from overseas through our influencing work and service delivery across the UK. The legislative context is slightly different across the different administrations. In England and Wales the Modern Slavery Act 2015 brings together previous offences relating to trafficking and slavery and contains a number of protection provisions for adults and children who are victims of trafficking. It also established the Anti-Slavery Commissioner. The Act does not cover Scotland and Northern Ireland as there are other similar policies in place in those jurisdictions. Scotland has the Human Trafficking and Exploitation Act 2015 and Northern Ireland has the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Act 2015.
- Some examples of our recent engagement across the UK include: our National Counter Trafficking Service which delivers the Independent Child Trafficking Advocates in England and Wales and the Panel for the Protection of Trafficked Children in the West Midlands; our specialist foster care service that specifically trains foster parents for unaccompanied asylum seeking and trafficked children; our research into the experience of separated children in Northern Ireland<sup>1</sup>; and our

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.barnardos.org.uk/ni\\_child\\_trafficking\\_pp\\_briefing.pdf](http://www.barnardos.org.uk/ni_child_trafficking_pp_briefing.pdf)

response to the Draft Northern Ireland Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery Strategy 2016/17<sup>2</sup>.

### **Actions that are required to better protect children from the risks of trafficking and exploitation**

Under Barnardo's National Counter Trafficking Service we run the Home Office funded Independent Child Trafficking Advocate scheme. Following a pilot project in 23 local authorities in 2014-15, which we also ran, the current scheme is operating in three early-adopter sites: Greater Manchester, Hampshire and nationally in Wales.

- Thousands of children have been caught up in the ongoing refugee crisis and we've seen more and more unaccompanied children arriving into the UK alone.
- Many of these children have travelled into and through Europe on their own. They are all extremely vulnerable to being trafficked and exploited on their journey and once they are in the UK.
- The Government has committed to providing independent advocates for all children that have been trafficked. However, unaccompanied children do not currently receive this support.
- We are worried about this for two reasons:
  1. Many trafficked children do not disclose that they have been trafficked until they have built a relationship of trust with a supportive adult. Without the support of an advocate, unaccompanied children may not disclose that they have been trafficked and may slip through the net of social services or return to their traffickers. Providing all unaccompanied children with an advocate would likely lead to more trafficked children being identified and helped.
  2. Unaccompanied children are incredibly vulnerable and need support to help them recover. They are likely to have faced trauma on their harrowing journeys to the UK. An independent advocate would build a strong, trusting relationship with these children to help stop them from being exploited or trafficked in the UK, and would help make sure they receive the support they need to recover.

Barnardo's supported the UK government's decision to bring Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) to the UK through Section 67 of the Immigration Act 2016, commonly known as 'the Dubs Amendment'. Through our work with victims of trafficking in the UK, we know that unaccompanied children are vulnerable to

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<sup>2</sup> [http://www.barnardos.org.uk/barnardo\\_s\\_ni\\_response\\_-\\_draft\\_ni\\_human\\_trafficking\\_and\\_modern\\_slavery\\_strategy\\_2016-17.pdf](http://www.barnardos.org.uk/barnardo_s_ni_response_-_draft_ni_human_trafficking_and_modern_slavery_strategy_2016-17.pdf)

exploitation and abuse in their journeys through Europe. The scheme to relocate these children to the UK through the Dubs amendment was a welcome way that these children were afforded protection. We are worried that the decision to end the relocation of these children will not prevent trafficking, as intended, but may make children more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

**The ability and willingness of local authorities to accept more unaccompanied minors**

- In Northern Ireland, Barnardo's NI works with approximately 10,000 children, young people and families across more than 40 different services and programmes and in up to 250 schools. We provide a wide range of services, from providing family support to working directly with children who are in the care system, who are disabled, or who have experienced child sexual exploitation, along with other groups in need of support. We believe that every child deserves the best possible start in life, and our service provision reflects that philosophy.
- Our response is directly informed by our experiences of working with refugee children in Northern Ireland. As a leading organisation supporting the Syrian Vulnerable Person's Relocation Scheme in Northern Ireland, we have supported the arrival and integration of more than 500 Syrians across Northern Ireland, of which more than 50% have been children aged under 18.
- Other relevant services we provide in Northern Ireland which inform our broader position on this issue include: Safe Choices, a specialist child sexual exploitation service which also supports children who go missing from their accommodation within the care system and can provide specialist therapeutic support for children trafficked for sexual exploitation; our range of counselling services for children and young people; as well as our services and research work in the area of newcomer children<sup>3</sup>. In addition, our extensive experience in recruiting and supporting foster carers through our Professional Fostering service, and in supporting looked after young people to transition from the care system to independent living through our Leaving Care semi-independent accommodation and support provision, contribute to our holistic understanding of supporting vulnerable young people, with many of the skills and knowledge gained from these services applicable to supporting unaccompanied and separated children.
- Barnardo's NI supports the Home Office with the relocation of UASC to Northern Ireland and calls upon relevant stakeholders in Northern

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.barnardos.org.uk/9788 - education\\_report\\_d9.pdf](http://www.barnardos.org.uk/9788 - education_report_d9.pdf)

Ireland to actively demonstrate willingness for Northern Ireland to provide a place of sanctuary to these children and young people.

- The Home Office does not produce individual asylum statistics for Northern Ireland but includes them in data with Scotland. This makes it difficult to plan and monitor Northern Ireland's role in UK asylum support. We rely on colleagues in Law Centre (NI) who identify that the number of separated children in Northern Ireland has always been very low, with a total of 34 unaccompanied children referred to the Health and Social Care Trusts between April 2012 and March 2015<sup>4</sup>, with 13 referrals in 2015/16<sup>5</sup>.
- Through its work on supporting victims of human trafficking, Law Centre (NI) has described the very positive support provided to unaccompanied minors at Glenmona Resource Centre where children benefit from a dedicated therapeutic support service with onsite facilities for learning English language, leisure facilities and faith groups.
- In addition, it is anticipated that by autumn 2017 Northern Ireland will have implemented the legal guardian provision of the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (NI) Act 2015 that provides an independent legal guardian for all separated children in Northern Ireland.
- These provisions demonstrate that Northern Ireland is in a prime position to accept additional unaccompanied children from Europe. While these schemes are considered, Northern Ireland can play an immediate role in the ongoing National Transfer Scheme. Launched in July 2016, this facilitates the transfer of UASC from Local Authorities with a larger UASC population to authorities with capacity elsewhere in the UK.<sup>6</sup> To date, Northern Ireland has not played an active role in the National Transfer Scheme.<sup>7</sup>
- Barnardo's NI would be keen to work in partnership with statutory and voluntary sector organisations to host UASC in Northern Ireland and help integrate them into the community to ensure that these children

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<sup>4</sup> Delegated Statutory Functions Statistical Report, 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015 (HSCB)  
<http://www.hscboard.hscni.net/board/meetings/Meetings%202015/September%202015/Item%2010%20-%2005%20-%20DSF%20Statistical%20Report%20March%2015%20Regional%20PDF%202927KB.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.hscboard.hscni.net/download/PUBLIC-MEETINGS/HSC%20BOARD/Board-Meetings-2016/october\\_2016/Item-08-03-DSF-Statistical-Report-March-2016.pdf](http://www.hscboard.hscni.net/download/PUBLIC-MEETINGS/HSC%20BOARD/Board-Meetings-2016/october_2016/Item-08-03-DSF-Statistical-Report-March-2016.pdf) p.70

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/534258/Interim\\_National\\_UASC\\_transfer\\_protocol.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/534258/Interim_National_UASC_transfer_protocol.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2017-02-21/64756/>

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2017-03-07/66977/>

get tailored specialist support to overcome the trauma they've experienced and help them settle into life in the UK.

- Our work as part of the Syrian Vulnerable Person's Relocation scheme in Northern Ireland and the success of the voluntary sector consortium delivering this scheme demonstrates that Northern Ireland has the experience and skills to play an active role in supporting vulnerable children and young people build a new life in safe surroundings. We believe the co-design process between the government and voluntary sector is one of the main reasons for the success of the project.
- Northern Ireland is also in the unique position of being able to offer a single response from the competent authority as unaccompanied and separated children in NI fall under the jurisdiction of the Northern Ireland Department of Health. This is a Northern Ireland wide body that could co-ordinate the relevant Health and Social Care Trusts to deliver a robust and consistent service.
- From our work on Syrian resettlement and the positive public reaction, we believe there would be support for such an initiative. The Northern Ireland Executive decision to support Syrian resettlement in September 2015 reflects the public interest in the issue and the desire for Northern Ireland to become involved in supporting vulnerable refugees; we strongly believe this should be expanded to include unaccompanied and separated children and build on the success of supporting young Syrian refugees and children who now call Northern Ireland 'home'.

Barnardo's and Barnardo's NI appreciate the opportunity to provide comments to this inquiry and would be happy to engage further with the inquiry as it progresses.

Please contact Julia Buchanan or Alison Worsley with any queries:

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