

Child trafficking victims being let down by UK government, say experts

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As Human Trafficking Awareness Day is marked across the world tomorrow (11 January), experts from Royal Holloway have condemned the Government for failing to put the welfare of child trafficking victims above concerns about immigration control.

A team of academics warned that the UK authorities' lack of understanding about child victims' backgrounds can leave them vulnerable to further exploitation, either in the UK or abroad if they are deported to their home country.

"Human trafficking is a horrendous crime that causes an immense amount of suffering for the victims", said Anna Gupta, from the Department of Social Work at Royal Holloway University. "Child victims are held against their will and can be forced into a life of sexual abuse, domestic servitude or criminal activity. However, if they are identified and rescued, they then have to go through a series of complex and stressful asylum or immigration processes.

"Indeed, some children such as Vietnamese boys trafficked to work in cannabis factories, are often treated as criminals not victims. We know that when these children are sent back to their home country they can be left in desperate circumstances and are at risk of exploitation by traffickers once again. Many young victims go missing in the UK in order to avoid deportation and also face similar risks as undocumented migrants."

Bringing together expertise from Royal Holloway's Social Work, Geography and Media Arts departments, a group of academics have been [studying the experiences of unaccompanied and separated migrant children in the UK](#).

The experts urged the Government to put the interests of children at the heart of its policies, to ensure child victims do not disappear following their initial care in the UK and are then re-trafficked.

"New measures could include providing a legal guardian for child victims to support them through the duration of their care. This would be a critical step towards ensuring that young trafficking victims get the

support they need and help ensure their welfare into adulthood", Ms Gupta added.

Provided by Royal Holloway, University of London

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