Introduction

1. Unaccompanied migrant children and child victims of modern slavery, including trafficking, can be some of the most vulnerable children in the country. Unaccompanied children are alone, in an unfamiliar country and may be surrounded by people unable to speak their first language. Modern slavery includes human trafficking, slavery, servitude and forced or compulsory labour. Exploitation takes a number of forms, including sexual exploitation, forced labour, forced criminality, begging, organ harvesting and domestic servitude and victims may come from all walks of life.[1]

2. Unaccompanied children are likely to be uncertain or unaware of their rights and whom they should trust. They are at increased risk of going missing, often leaving the care of those who would protect them to return to traffickers who will continue their exploitation. All groups may have experienced emotional trauma in their country of birth, on their journey to the UK or through their treatment by adults in the UK.

3. Local authorities have a duty to protect and support these highly vulnerable children. Because of the circumstances they have faced, unaccompanied migrant children and child victims of modern slavery, including trafficking, often have complex needs in addition to those faced by looked after children more generally. The support required to address these needs must begin as soon as the child is referred to the local authority or is found in the local authority area. It will be most effective where this support is provided through a stable, continuous relationship with the child.

4. This guidance sets out the steps local authorities should take to plan for the provision of support for looked after children who are unaccompanied asylum seeking children, unaccompanied migrant children or child victims of modern slavery including trafficking. Elements of this guidance will also be relevant for the care of looked after UK nationals who may also be child victims of modern slavery. It does not provide detailed guidance on steps that local authorities should take, in partnership with other agencies, to identify and protect child victims of modern slavery, including trafficking, before they become looked after. This is described in practice guidance *Safeguarding children who may have been trafficked*,[2] published by the Department for Education and Home Office in 2011.

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[1] For a full explanation of modern slavery, see Modern Slavery Act statutory guidance, due to be published in 2017.

[2] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/safeguarding-children-who-may-have-been-trafficked-practice-guidance

Information sharing: Advice for practitioners providing safeguarding services to children, young people, parents and carers (2015).[40]

39. Where there are safeguarding concerns relating to the care and welfare of any unaccompanied child, including where modern slavery is suspected or has been identified, these should be investigated in line with the statutory provisions, *Working Together to Safeguard Children* (2015) statutory guidance and locally agreed protocols and processes. The opportunity to intervene to prevent any further exploitation might be very narrow, so the entry local authority should convene a strategy discussion as soon as possible and take any necessary immediate action to safeguard and promote the child's welfare. This strategy discussion should involve the police, immigration officials and any other relevant agencies and plan rapid further action if concerns are substantiated.

40. Many unaccompanied and/or trafficked children are at risk of going missing from care, often within the first 72 hours, whilst others may be at risk of repeated missing episodes due to ongoing exploitation. Children may go missing because of uncertainty over their immigration status or due to feeling unsupported or being unsure or unaware of what it means to be "looked after" and that they need to communicate their whereabouts to carers. Even if they are not a victim of modern slavery, unaccompanied children are still highly vulnerable and if they go missing they are at risk of being exploited or mistreated.

41. Provision may need to be made for the child to be in a safe place before any further assessment takes place and for the possibility that they may not be able to disclose full information about their circumstances immediately. The location of the child should not be divulged to any enquirers until their identity and relationship with the child have been established and the local authority is assured of their motives, if necessary, with the help of police and immigration officials.

42. Before the entry local authority refers a looked after child victim or potential victim of modern slavery to the National Transfer Scheme, they must consider whether it is in the best interests of the child to do so. If the initial strategy discussion has led to the decision to initiate section 47 enquiries, the transfer should not be implemented if the completion of these enquiries and subsequent assessment process would be hindered.

43. The local authority in whose area the looked after child is has responsibility for looking after the child.[41] The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 require the responsible local authority to undertake

[40] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/safeguarding-practitioners-information-sharing-advice

[41] This may be the entry local authority if the child remains there or the receiving local authority if the child is transferred.