

Document name: Age assessment guidance, Guidance to assist social workers and their managers in undertaking age assessments in England – Trafficking
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Trafficking

Since the inception of the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) for victims of trafficking, an increasing number of children have been identified as potential victims of trafficking.¹ At the time of writing, the NRM process had been reviewed, and a pilot scheme was being implemented to recognise victims of trafficking. As a social worker, you have an important role to play in ensuring the safety of trafficked children and young people.

Many trafficked children and young people go missing within 48 hours of becoming looked after. Suspicions of trafficking require a bold and immediate response to keep the child or young person safe, and a Section 47 enquiry and the development of a robust safety plan will be appropriate in most cases. Where there is uncertainty about age, a suspected victim of trafficking must be presumed to be a child and be accorded special protection measures pending assessment of their age.²

Children and young people who have been trafficked into the UK are likely to have had experiences which have an impact on their ability to participate fully and openly in an age assessment. Aside from the physical, sexual or emotional abuse they may have suffered, many trafficked children have been forced by their traffickers to learn a story to tell if they are questioned. Many children and young people are under threat directly themselves, or may have family members elsewhere who are under threat, or perceived threat. Children and young people may not know at this stage who they can trust. As a result, they may give information that is later contradictory to information provided initially. This is not necessarily an indication that a child or young person is trying to deceive social workers, and should not be considered as such. Social workers need to look at the situation holistically and consider the circumstances surrounding each child or young person.

Trafficked children and young people may have been provided with documents by their traffickers which are either false, or are genuine documents but not belonging to the child or young person. For example, it is common for visa applications with incorrect details to be

¹ Statistics compiled by the National Crime Agency
<http://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/publications/national-referral-mechanism-statistics/502-nationalreferral-mechanism-statistics-end-of-year-summary-2014/file>

² S.51 Modern Slavery Act 2015, Available at:
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/30/section/51/enacted>

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made to enable the movement of children from one country to another. The existence of a document does not necessarily prove someone’s age.

Your Local Safeguarding Children Board is now required to have local guidance for working with trafficked children. The London Safeguarding Children Board has also published comprehensive guidance and a toolkit for working with trafficked children, which is accessible to all via their website.³

³ London Safeguarding Children Board child trafficking toolkit and guidance. Available at: <http://www.londonscb.gov.uk/trafficking/>