

Crossing Borders:

preliminary research on human
trafficking in Northern Ireland

women's aid

Federation Northern Ireland

Published by Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland

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Published by: Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland

Date: 2006

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Foreword

“Violence against women is perhaps the most shameful human rights violation. It knows no boundaries of geography, culture or wealth. As long as it continues, we cannot claim to be making real progress towards equality, development, and peace.”

Kofi Annan,
United Nations
Secretary-General

Human Trafficking: Evil Knows No Borders

To suggest that countries allow slave trading in the 21st century would seem outrageous. However, the fact is, human trafficking is slavery. People (mostly women and children) are abducted from their homes — forcibly, or through scheming lies — transplanted to an alien country, forced to work in the sex trade against their will, and any means of escape is brutally blocked. If any of these terrorised women or children do break free there is a strong possibility they will be labelled as an illegal immigrant and deported without any opportunity to claim refuge. And deportation often means that they fall straight back into the clutches of the traffickers in their home country.

This is an outrage against the human rights of women and children and it is happening here in Northern Ireland. In addition, the gang culture that has evolved out of the conflict here has created conditions where this type of gross exploitation can flourish.

Women’s Aid is calling for zero tolerance of this 21st century abhorrence: we call on government, statutory agencies, civil society, churches, trade unions, business, political parties and local communities to come together, recognise the problem and work to end this nightmare.

We urgently need an integrated strategy to end violence against women in all its forms; a strategy that will challenge the values and behaviours that allow this abuse to exist.

Crossing Borders is preliminary research; more in-depth research is needed to unveil the full extent of the problem. But we can’t sit and wait for this, we need to act together now to reach out to these women and children, to provide them with places of refuge and safety and to insist that the criminal justice system tracks down the perpetrators and imposes sanctions that reflect the horror of this crime.

When you go to sleep tonight imagine yourself—a frightened, captive stranger in a strange land—we cannot fondly imagine ourselves to be living in a free democracy whilst this horror is unfolding behind the closed doors of our cities, towns and villages. Until these women and children are free we are all enslaved.

Annie Campbell

Director

Women’s Aid Federation Northern Ireland

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In memory of Qu Mei Na

In June 2004, the body of a 22 year old Chinese woman was found stuffed in a bin bag in the boot of a Ford Escort parked at a petrol station in Antrim Road in Belfast. Police confirmed that links with both Triad gangs and a suspected brothel in North Belfast were possible lines of inquiry.¹ The next day it was reported that the police were looking at the possibility that her murder was a 'domestic incident' and not linked to criminal gangs.²

After two months of police work using dental records, a passport photo and fingerprints, she was identified as Qu Mei Na from the Dalian City of the Liaoning province of China.³ It appeared that she had been in Ireland for 18 months and had travelled from Dublin to Belfast by bus several days before her murder. Two men were tried on charges of murder, assault, and false imprisonment, and assault, false imprisonment and assisting an offender.

In August 2004, the police officers who detected the crime travelled to north-eastern China to inform her parents of the death of their only child. A funeral service conducted by a Methodist minister in March 2005 for Qu Mei Na was attended by representatives from churches, the Chinese Welfare Association and members of the police force.⁴

Police officers, members of Chinese communities in Northern Ireland, and many others demonstrated a profound regard for the dignity of this victim of crime and her family. However, two comments made about the case during this research illustrate—not the truth of the case, that may never be known—but some of the issues involved that raise more questions than answers:

*'I did ask about the young woman murdered but this was not regarded as trafficking as they [the police] say she was a prostitute by consent.'*⁵

*'The Chinese woman found murdered in the boot of the car—there is so much silence! But from rumours it appeared that she was brought over on false pretences and had been charged outrageous sums of money. She had been working in a restaurant. She didn't want to go into prostitution and the rumours were that she escaped from Dublin to Northern Ireland, and then she was tracked down and killed.'*⁶

The people who made these two statements stress that they are not evidence.

Nonetheless, these comments demonstrate social attitudes that are linked more broadly to both trafficking and violence against women, even as they express conclusions formed by some individuals about this particular case. There is for example, for every expression of violence against women and girls—whether rape, domestic violence, prostitution and involvement in the sex trade, or trafficking—a perception in wide currency that victims have given their consent to abuse.

This perception is problematic, at least, for reasons developed in the paper below. Unless this perception is challenged, it can be the foundation of widespread social tolerance of abuse of women and girls in all its forms.

The statements quoted above also suggest a common experience of secrecy, and the danger, especially if women try to escape abuse. There are links too, between different forms of violence, the difficulty recognising the problems, and the difficult burden of proof. Whether trafficked or not—and according to international definitions of trafficking, it does not appear clear that she was not—a woman was murdered far from her home. When her body was discovered no one could be found who knew her name.

For the campaign to end violence against women, this research is dedicated to the memory of Qu Mei Na.

Rebecca Dudley
2006

A woman was murdered far from her home. When her body was discovered no one could be found who knew her name.

For the campaign to end violence against women, this research is dedicated to the memory of Qu Mei Na.

The purpose of this paper is to increase the likelihood that trafficked people in Northern Ireland might find options for safety and support.

Aims of this research

The principal objective of this paper is to increase the likelihood that trafficked people in Northern Ireland might find options for safety and support.

To this end, this research is intended to:

- inform colleagues in the statutory and NGO sectors in Northern Ireland about trafficking, and to identify challenges for concerned members of these sectors.
- build a case for more resources for research, policy development, and training: for NGOs and government bodies concerned with service provision, the administration of criminal justice, immigration, human rights, support for women, children and young people, migrants, asylum seekers and refugees.
- share further resources that can assist staff of relevant organisations to identify and support trafficked people.
- contribute to arguments, from a Northern Ireland context, for stronger legal frameworks; starting with UK participation in European protocols.⁷

This research was initially undertaken with another aim in mind: to provide the basis for a submission, should the evidence merit it, on the nature and extent of trafficking in Northern Ireland. This was the first area on which evidence was requested by the Joint Committee of Human Rights at Westminster in October 2005. A paper, eight pages in length, was written on the basis of this research and submitted to the JCHR from Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland, in January 2006.

Summary

The first section of the research outlines the difficulties of defining trafficking, and therefore of identifying people who have been trafficked.

The second section continues with a brief outline of international, European, and domestic law.

The third section of the research is a literature review of some general points about trafficking (mostly of women and children) to the UK and the patterns that have emerged in research that is based in England.

There are two types of patterns into which the Northern Ireland context 'fits.' First, Northern Ireland is affected by international migration patterns that are shaped by conflict and gender inequality as well as increasing globalised financial systems. Second, some of the issues that have emerged in other parts of the UK—trafficking of women and children, unaccompanied minors—are also reflected in Northern Ireland.

The fourth section of the research is focussed on Northern Ireland (in the context of the freedom of movement across the land border on the island). First, it details some assessments of immigration crime by police. Two newspapers are then surveyed for trafficking stories that have been in the public domain, mostly in the last 5 years. The search was restricted to *The Irish News* and the *Belfast Telegraph*; in these two publications nonetheless patterns emerge that coincide with patterns of trafficking that have emerged in England. Finally, the results of written and face to face interviews with people are compiled.

The police sources, newspaper reports and interview results together suggest that there are reasons for concerns about four categories of trafficking in this country, sometimes overlapping. All four categories relate to the accepted international definition of the term.

The first category is a subject for a separate study and will be noted but not developed very much in this paper. There is cause for concern about adults who have been smuggled into the country and subjected to exploitative labour practices. This may or may not constitute trafficking according to the definition, depending on the levels of coercion and exploitation practiced.

The other three categories will be explored in more detail:

- 1) Women and girls who have been trafficked or smuggled into the country and appeared to be subjected to exploitation, often in prostitution.
- 2) Unaccompanied minors from other countries who have increased in numbers in recent years, with many questions attached to their presence here and
- 3) Children & young people born in Northern Ireland who are being systematically sexually exploited in Northern Ireland and/or moved to other jurisdictions for the purposes of sexual exploitation.

Concerns that have been raised more widely about the police response to trafficking, and low levels of awareness among other statutory workers (eg social workers) may also be justified in Northern Ireland. Finally, there is a concern specific to Northern Ireland that organised crime overlaps considerably with paramilitary activities in this jurisdiction and therefore there are particular challenges to law enforcement in this area.

This is preliminary research but the paper argues that the body of commentary that emerges nonetheless justifies further resources: time, money, training and staffing priorities towards a greater knowledge of trafficked people in this country and a greater commitment to their protection and safety. Further it argues that legal frameworks need to be reformed to ensure that the victims of trafficking are treated in a manner consonant with their human rights, firstly as victims rather than illegal immigrants or criminals.

Introduction

Trafficking as violence against women

This research is about people who are so 'marginal' that few even know that they exist in Northern Ireland. It was undertaken as a response to a call for evidence by the Joint Committee on Human Rights (JCHR) in Westminster into Human Trafficking in the UK, issued in October 2005.

Why does trafficking matter?

The JCHR writes that:

*'Human trafficking, the transporting of people for exploitation through violence, coercion, deception, or the abuse of power, violates the human rights of its victims. In particular, it violates the right to freedom from slavery servitude or forced labour, and the right to freedom from inhuman and degrading treatment. It may also involve breaches of other rights, including rights to liberty, privacy and physical integrity. Trafficking engages the positive obligation of the state to protect against breaches of these and other rights by private individuals, by providing and enforcing an effective legal framework to... combat trafficking. It also engages the State's positive obligation to ensure the safety of victims of trafficking and to protect them from further violations of human rights.'*⁸

The primary purpose of this work was to provide a brief paper with evidence for Westminster. This was developed and submitted in a brief paper in February 2006. However, in the course of the research it became evident that another purpose may also be served: to raise awareness about trafficking among Northern Ireland NGOs, churches, statutory agencies, academics and others, and identify some challenges and some resources.

Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland is concerned with trafficking because it is a form of violence against women and girls. This kind of violence persists in scale and intensity against a background of widespread social indifference.⁹ As Noeleen Heyzer, the Director of the UN Development Fund for Women, writes:

*'violence against women has become as much a pandemic as HIV/AIDs or malaria. But it is still generally downplayed by the public at large and by policy makers who fail to create programmes to eradicate it.'*¹⁰

Trafficking should be regarded as a crime to be challenged with other forms of violence against women—like domestic violence and rape—by an integrated strategy that recognises their gendered and connected foundations.¹¹

One of the profound connections between the forms of violence against women is revealed in the statistics about the coercive nature

'I work in a very seedy world that no one is particularly interested in knowing about. If you do tell people, they don't believe it.'

'They think it happens somewhere else.'

A worker with young people at risk

of much of prostitution, one of the areas into which women and children are trafficked. For example, women who are in prostitution are often abused. According to the the US State Department:

*'Few activities are as brutal and damaging as prostitution. Filed research in nine countries concluded that 60 to 75 per cent of prostitutes were raped, and 68 per cent met the criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder in the same range as treatment seeking combat veterans and victims of state torture.'*¹²

The State Department quotes a 2003 edition of the scientific *Journal of Trauma Practice* that found that 89 per cent of women in prostitution wanted to escape prostitution.¹³

This violence against women, in all its forms can be understood as the most extreme form of the discrimination that women face in every society. There are profound links between trafficking, violence and discrimination against women noted in the recent shadow reports by UK NGOs to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women:

*'Women's inequality with men underpins trafficking, with vulnerability to recruitment and entrapment linked to the gendered impacts of conflicts, economic transition and poverty, coupled with their life experiences (child sexual abuse, domestic violence, poor status).'*¹⁴

Domestic violence, for example, is a contributing factor to women searching for work abroad and therefore becoming vulnerable to traffickers.¹⁵

Trafficking is a series of crimes committed against women and children (largely) whose recourse to safety and justice is usually disadvantaged by multiples of gender, age, poverty, ethnicity, language, and immigration status. Sometimes physical impairment is an additional factor which can make women and children more vulnerable to power and control of traffickers. To compound these disadvantages, women and children who have been trafficked are often perceived as illegal immigrants, or criminals, rather than victims.

Domestic violence, for example, is a contributing factor to women searching for work abroad and therefore becoming vulnerable to traffickers.

Section 1: Who is trafficked?

Some borders are not marked

Trafficking¹⁷ in human beings is not new, but law enforcement agencies and non-governmental organisations worldwide agree that it is a rapidly growing problem. No one knows exactly how many people are trafficked because by its nature it is a criminal activity and statistics are hard to determine. The ECPAT Coalition¹⁸ cites US government figures that 800,000 to 900,000 people worldwide are trafficked across borders each year. This is a lower estimate than for example, the estimate of the UN Special Session on Children in 2002 that 1.2 million children were trafficked each year. These figures do not include those who are trafficked internally, or within borders (a problem that has been identified in Northern Ireland). These figures are particularly sobering when contrasted to prosecution and conviction rates. According to the US Department of State statistics on global law enforcement: during 2004, it states there were—worldwide — 6885 prosecutions and 3025 convictions of traffickers.¹⁹

According to Anti-Slavery International²⁰ the majority of people worldwide who are trafficked are women and children. The US State Department in its *Trafficking in Persons* report in June 2005 estimated that '80 percent of victims are female, and up to 50 per cent are children.'²¹

Coerced labour is a part of the picture too. The International Labour Organisation estimated in May 2005 that at least 12.5 million people are victims of forced labour worldwide. A summary of their findings:

*'Of these, they estimated that 9.8 million are exploited by private agents and 2.4 million people are in forced labour as a result of human trafficking. They estimated that the profits derived each year from trafficked people are over US \$31 billion. The report finds that most people are in the Asia and Pacific region. It states that 32 per cent of trafficked people are used for forced economic exploitation and 43 per cent for forced commercial sexual exploitation. The remainder are trafficked for a mixture of the above.'*²²

Sometimes it is not clear where the lines are crossed in trafficking even to those being trafficked. The question of what exactly constitutes trafficking has been debated for decades. The UNICEF definition, for example is that '*trafficking refers to the illegal transport of human beings, in particular women and children, for the purposes of selling them or exploiting their labour.*'²³ Anti-Slavery International would add '*it is slavery because traffickers use violence, threats, and other forms of coercion to force their victims to work against their will. This includes controlling their freedom of movement, where and when they will work and what pay, if any, they will receive.*'²⁴

A shorthand might be that trafficking involves transporting people through deception or coercion. If people are transported through

'Trafficking can be viewed as a moral, criminal, migration, human rights, public order, or labour issue.'

(Kalayaan, 1999, cited by Kelly 1998)¹⁶

Where does people **smuggling** become people **trafficking**?

deception then their experience may be characterised by decreasing levels of autonomy and increasing levels of coercion for the purposes of exploitation. However, it is not that simple, and this is one of the difficulties of identifying people who have been trafficked.

Smuggling—assisting someone for a fee to cross a border illegally—is not the same as trafficking. But the lines are not clear. Where does people **smuggling** become people **trafficking**? There may be exorbitant fees charged in the people smuggling trade, but if people are autonomous on their arrival and allowed to move freely and engage in labour of their choice, they may not have been trafficked. As one community interpreter in Northern Ireland said, *‘I don’t think there will be statistics...but I have heard lots of stories from people. I know of circumstances where there has been financial exploitation. Or they have arrived here and had to do illegal things afterwards.’*²⁵ A person may be trafficked, according to the definition, even if he/she gave initial consent to the journey, prompted by prospects of a better job in another country.

More generally, the issue of consent implies choice, and analysts of trafficking point out that economic circumstances in the sending countries often reduce choices to little or none. As Liz Kelly points out in research for the Home Office *‘It is evident that traffickers are adept at reading local, regional, and international politics, targeting women whose lives and possibilities have been disrupted and diminished by economic, political and social dislocation.’*²⁶ She adds, *‘The context of a woman’s life can be taken into account when considering choice in entering the sex industry. Whilst all human beings have agency, the ability to act within an oppressive context limits the available options.’*²⁷ If the person trafficked is a child (legal definition: under 18 years old) the concept of choice is more difficult still.

In each of these cases, there may be a spectrum that includes perceived and real options, from smuggling to trafficking, and from consent to coercion to the threat and reality of violence to ensure compliance. It may be difficult in some cases for the individuals themselves to know when each line has been crossed into another area in which their autonomy is reduced as the coercive power over them is increased.

These debates have been largely settled—at the theoretical level at least—and an internationally accepted definition of trafficking is emerging. The first internationally accepted standard to define and address trafficking is found in the *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons* (signed by the United Kingdom December 14, 2000). This protocol is attached to the *UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime* (2000). It is replicated in Article 4 of the *Revised Draft Council of Europe Convention on action against trafficking in human beings*:²⁸

‘ a) “Trafficking in human beings” shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by

means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, or the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs;

b) the consent of a victim of “trafficking in human beings” to the intended exploitation set forth in subparagraph a) of this article shall be irrelevant where any of the means set forth in subparagraph a) have been used;

c) the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered “trafficking in human beings” even if this does not involve any of the means set forth in subparagraph a) of this article;

d) “child” shall mean any person under eighteen years of age;

e) “victim” shall mean any person who is subject to any act set forth in this Article²⁹

There are a couple elements of this definition worth drawing out. First, the elements of trafficking include exploitation and transport.

The exploitation can take various forms: notice that trafficking in this definition is not solely for use in the sex trade.

Secondly, the element of transportation is not decisive. A person does not have to cross a border between countries to have been trafficked. The definition of trafficking in people covers exploitation within a country: *‘It applies to cases of UK women and children who are moved around the country, sold between exploiters, and subject to deception and coercion.’³⁰* Sexual exploitation of people born in Northern Ireland, who continue to live here, is also trafficking.

Notice that trafficking in this definition is not solely for use in the sex trade.

Section 2: Legal frameworks

2.1 International legal framework

Slavery, forced labour and trafficking have been a matter of international concern, and attempts at regulation, for some time. International conventions have been adopted on issues related to slavery and trafficking since the 1920s. Early conventions include:

- The Slavery Convention (1927)
- The Protocol amending the Slavery Convention (1953)
- Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade and the Institutions and Practices Similar to slavery (1956)
- Convention for the suppression of the traffic in Personal and of the Exploitation of Prostitution of Others (1949)
- Forced Labour Convention (1930)
- Abolition of Forced labour Convention (1957)

Trafficking is also prohibited by The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (1979).

The United Nations in 2000 developed two protocols to strengthen international law³¹ with regard to trafficking: the *Protocol Against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea or Air*, and the *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish the Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children*. Both of these protocols supplemented the *United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime*. These protocols entered into force 29 September 2003. The UK government Foreign Office website suggests that the UK has signed the treaty and its protocols and will ratify as soon as the necessary domestic legislation is enacted. It also suggests that they are encouraging and assisting the incorporation of these protocols into domestic law around the world.³²

2.2: European legal frameworks

The Council of Europe (with 45 member states) is currently drafting a Convention on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings. Anti-Slavery International explains that '*one of the main purposes of the convention is to design a comprehensive framework for the protection and assistance of victims and witnesses.*' The convention has seven chapters which cover prevention, cooperation and other measures, such as Article 6 measures to discourage the demand, and Article 7 border measures.

One of the key advances on current legislation would appear to be the measures to protect and promote the rights of victims, taking gender equality aspects into consideration. Article 10 outlines measures for assistance of victims of trafficking. Article 11 allows for compensation to victims of trafficking and Article 14 includes the recovery and reflection period, *'to reflect, and escape the influence of the traffickers, and take informed decision about cooperating with competent authorities.'*

The fourth chapter of the draft convention is concerned with substantive Criminal Law, both Article 17, the Criminalisation of trafficking in human beings, and Article 18, the Criminalisation of the use of services of a victim.

Other chapters are concerned with international cooperation and monitoring mechanisms for the convention.

All the major NGOs who have been concerned with trafficking have urged that the UK become a signatory to this convention, though some—including Anti-Slavery international and Amnesty International—have argued in the past that it did not go far enough to providing redress for victims (like educational and job opportunities for example).

All the major NGOs who have been concerned with trafficking have urged that the UK become a signatory to this convention.

2.3: Domestic legal frameworks

The Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 included an offence of 'traffic in Prostitution' (section 145). This reads:

'(1) A person commits an offence if he arranges or facilitates the arrival in the United Kingdom of an individual (the "passenger") and-

'(a) he intends to exercise control over prostitution by the passenger in the United Kingdom or elsewhere, or

'(b) he believes that another person is likely to exercise control over prostitution by the passenger in the United Kingdom or elsewhere.'

The offence in subsection 4 states that

'(4) for the purposes of (1) to (3) a person exercises control over prostitution by another if for the purposes of gain he exercises control, direction or influence over the prostitute's movements in a way that shows that he is aiding, abetting or compelling the prostitution.'

Carron Somerset notes that this legislation is inadequate in that this Act relates only to prostitution, and it makes no distinction between the trafficking of a minor for prostitution and the trafficking of adults. Furthermore, *'for the purposes of gain'* is an evidential requirement that makes it harder to prove the offence.¹³³

More recently, this legislation was supplemented by the Sex Offences Act 2003, granted royal assent in November 2003, was due to come into force May 2004. Offences related to trafficking are in Sections 58–60.

Section 58, Trafficking into the UK for sexual exploitation, states that:

‘(1) A person (A) commits an offence if he intentionally arranges or facilitates the arrival in the United Kingdom of another person (B) and either –

‘(a) he intends to do anything to or in respect of B, after B’s arrival but in any part of the world, which if done will involve the commission of a relevant offence, or

‘(b) he intends to facilitate the doing of anything to or in respect of B, after B’s arrival but in any part of the world, which if done as he intends it to be done or believes it will be done will involve the commission of a relevant offence.’

The relevant offences are:

Section 49: Paying for sexual services of a child

Section 50: Causing or inciting child prostitution or pornography

Section 51: Controlling a child prostitute or a child involved in pornography

Section 52: Arranging or facilitating child prostitution or pornography.

Somerset also notes that the Government announced in November 2003 that they would introduce legislation making trafficking for various other forms of exploitation an offence.

Section 3: Trafficking in the UK

There is an increasing literature on trafficking, but very little that touches on Northern Ireland. Some of the research, however, identifies global economic and social patterns that affect migration, including migration to Northern Ireland. These include patterns of conflict that create pressures on women disproportionately, as well as patterns of global economic integration that make the process of money laundering across borders much easier.

Secondly, the UK based research identifies patterns within the UK that may be emerging in Northern Ireland too. This paper argues that five patterns, noted in three key pieces of research in England may be relevant to Northern Ireland.

First, the *Stopping Traffic* research for the Home Office identified the following:

- 1) the growth of the sex trade in 'off street locations',³⁴
- 2) concerns about low levels of knowledge about or attention to trafficking among police forces;³⁵ and
- 3) the links of trafficking with organised crime.³⁶

Two further trends of note for Northern Ireland were identified in *What the Professionals Know and Cause for Concern?*:

- 1) concerns about the rise in unaccompanied minors entering the UK;³⁷
- 2) patterns of exploitation of Eastern European girls.³⁸

3.1 Stopping Traffic

The Home Office funded the first major study on trafficking of women for sexual purposes in 2000, titled *Stopping Traffic*.³⁹ The report notes the emergence of trafficking as an international policy concern, and some of the contributory factors cited in separate scholarly reports [in brackets, as cited by Kelly⁴⁰]:

- the growth of the sex industry internationally, to the degree that it is a significant part of many national economies [Lim 1998]
- globalisation that makes the movement of people, capital, and businesses easier and faster
- increasing differentials between rich and poor in countries that have undergone rapid transformations, e.g. many of the accession countries in Eastern Europe [IOM 1999]
- the feminisation of poverty globally, which has in turn led to the feminisation of migration [Scrobanek, 1996]
- the increasing involvement and growth of organised crime in trafficking in persons Konig, 1997; [IOM, 1999].

It estimated that there may have been between 142 and 1420 women trafficked into the UK in 1998.

Kelly and Regan note that internationally, there is an 'increased involvement of women from regions marked by war and conflict, and those where economic change has had negative impacts on women's opportunities.'⁴¹ The link of trafficking with conflict and economic opportunities may also have implications for some communities in this country, in which the impact of the Northern Irish conflict has been particularly deep.

Estimates

With regard to the UK specifically, Kelly and Regan worked out a variety of different quantitative approaches to try to determine the scale of trafficking. Depending on the data and methods used, it estimated that there may have been between 142 and 1420 women trafficked into the UK in 1998. This research is cited in a number of subsequent pieces of research and the accepted format appears to be a compromise; they indicate that 'hundreds' were trafficked. The Home Office points out that most professionals would say that this is an underestimate.

Off-street locations

Secondly, Kelly and Regan's research notes that trafficked women are found in 'off-street' locations, a sector that has grown in recent years.⁴² This would appear to be the case in Ireland, north and south as well, and makes detection of victims of trafficking much more difficult in both these jurisdictions. The Metropolitan Police Service in England reported that '*foreign women now make up the majority of women working in prostitution in off-street sites, that a large proportion of these will have illegal immigration status and that a proportion of them will have been trafficked.*'⁴³

Low levels of knowledge

With regard to policing issues, Kelly and Regan expressed concern about the level of knowledge or attention that the police were giving to the issues around trafficking. According to Kelly, '*The majority of police forces have limited knowledge of, and thus give limited attention to, trafficking, and there is a danger that this unintentionally creates a climate of toleration for trafficking of women into and within the UK.*'⁴⁴

The perception that trafficking is a not a problem in their jurisdictions leads to:

- 1) a reluctance to allocate scarce resources
- 2) a reluctance to enter the contested area of prostitution, reflecting, Kelly says, '*the lack of nature of the nature of off-street, and hence not clearly visible, sex market.*'
- 3) an implicit climate of toleration, '*which traffickers and exploiters are unlikely to be slow to notice*' and
- 4) '*in the absense of a willingness to countenance that trafficking may be happening locally, it is extremely unlikely that cases will be identified, which in turn will serve as further justification of the current policy.*'⁴⁵

In a different section of the report, Kelly and Regan reiterate the point:

*'The survey of police forces carried out in this study found that where there is a reactive, nuisance based response to prostitution it is less likely that trafficked women will be detected. The conditions under which they exist, alongside with a fear of the authorities (many have come from authoritarian regimes and/or countries where corruption in law enforcement is rife) means that few will come forward for help. Police forces that insist they have no problem must ask themselves, whether, unintentionally, they are creating 'areas of toleration' for trafficking.'*⁴⁶

Links to organised crime

Trafficking is widely acknowledged to have deeper links with other criminal activities. The US State Department, for example notes that:

*'According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, human trafficking generates and estimated \$9.5 billion in annual revenue. It is closely connected with money laundering, drug trafficking, document forgery, and human smuggling. Where organised crime flourishes, governments and the rule of law are weakened.'*⁴⁷

Kelly and Regan⁴⁸ note that organised crime networks play a role and are linked closely with each other in international trafficking. They write:

*'Internationally, and the UK is no exception, trafficking people is a less risky activity for criminals than trafficking drugs. The maximum sentences for most jurisdictions are seldom as long for people trafficking as for drug trafficking (although there are now proposals to address this, including from the EU) The lower potential costs and the higher profits, especially where the traffic is for the purposes of prostitution, have acted as powerful incentives to organised crime, smaller networks and 'enterprising' individuals.'*⁴⁹

They also note the links between the local and international in this regard: Current intelligence reported in the Home Office Organised Crime Notification Scheme suggests links between international networks which traffic in drugs, money and human beings.⁵⁰

Some analysts observe that increasing professionalisation is required to outwit border controls and that as a result, 'we should anticipate an increase in the involvement of organised crime groups in the smuggling business.

The analyst continues:

'This development should worry us in several ways... First of all it is estimated that even today the amount of money earned in the smuggling of human beings has already superseded

Trafficking is widely acknowledged to have deeper links with other criminal activities.

*the profits made in the drugs trade (Ghosh 1998). This then implies that huge sums float around uncontrolled by tax inspectors and law enforcement agencies and can readily be invested in other fields of criminal activity. Second, criminal organisations may easily be even less interested in the well-being of clients, be it in transit or on arrival.*⁵¹

As organised crime in Northern Ireland is widely perceived to have paramilitary links, there may be particular and growing challenges to both communities and law enforcement agents in this jurisdiction with regard to trafficking.

3.2 What the Professionals Know

Kelly and Regan focussed on trafficking women; the second major piece of research (2000) was focussed on the trafficking of children into the UK for sexual purposes.⁵² This was a joint project by the ECPAT groups from eight European countries, including the UK. The researcher, Carron Somerset noted at the outset the lack of information about Northern Ireland; due to time limits of the research.

The report concluded that there is trafficking of children into the UK for sexual exploitation, and that the UK is a transit point for children to be forced into sexual exploitation elsewhere in Europe. According to this research, children are brought into the UK by 2 distinct channels.

Unaccompanied minors

The first channel relates to the disturbing phenomenon of children disappearing from care.⁵³ The researchers identified this as '*The use of asylum system and social services to look after the children at no expense to the traffickers.*' In West Sussex (one county) alone, authorities counted 66 children had gone missing from Care Homes, the youngest being 9 years old. The available evidence suggests that these unaccompanied minors are taken into care at the airport but due to threats (against them or family members), by prior arrangement with the traffickers, they contact the traffickers themselves and escape. It is unknown as to the extent of other children missing from other Social Services who may have been trafficked.

Eastern European women

The second channel relates to patterns of exploitation emerging particularly with women from Eastern Europe. These, according to the research were brought in by a 'boyfriend' or a mafia. Many of these young people are duped into prostitution. This theme was explored further in a second piece of research by the same author in *Cause for Concern?*

Researchers noted that it was impossible to estimate how many children are trafficked through other channels, adults pretending to

...there is trafficking of children into the UK for sexual exploitation, and that the UK is a transit point for children to be forced into sexual exploitation elsewhere in Europe.

be their parents, under sponsorship, and unaccompanied children. Colleagues in Northern Ireland raise concerns about this issue.

The research makes recommendations for primary research, legislation, services, and new protocols for protecting children on arrival as unaccompanied minors.

3.3 Cause for concern?

The same author worked with social services in London for over a year to compile further research, published in 2004.⁵⁴ In the later research, she noted evidence that finds echoes in the experiences of some professionals interviewed in Northern Ireland as they describe people they know. In the case of Eastern European girls, she writes:

*'the evidence of those rescued by the police, or in testimonies against their traffickers, reveals that the girls come into the UK accompanied by the trafficker, or met the trafficker soon after arriving. Before arriving, a relationship was often started by the trafficker, with the girl believing that she is the girlfriend or fiancée of her soon to be pimp. He may have 'rescued' her from prostitution...only to force her back into prostitution, and...live off her earnings. These relationships were characterised by violence, rape, and threats to the girl's family to ensure she does not leave. As in many trafficking cases, debt bondage was also used. This is where the trafficker will pay for the victim's expenses for travel, accommodation, etc, and then demand this money back from the victim (which they pay for through their labour). However, the debt is usually far higher than the actual costs, and may be impossible for the victim to pay back, no matter how hard they work.'*⁵⁵

Several individuals interviewed for this research in Northern Ireland voiced concern about relationships with 'boyfriends' that appeared to have developed along the lines described above.

3.4 Shadow reports to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

Some concern has been expressed about trafficking in both the UK and Ireland shadow reports prepared by NGOs for the CEDAW Convention reporting process in 2003 and 2004.⁵⁶ This report notes that *'trafficking and the sex industry are linked in significant ways, especially in the fact that women are trafficked for sexual exploitation into existing sex industries.'*

The Women's National Committee also made a submission to CEDAW in October 2003 in which they argue for tighter provisions in law, support for victims and against the immediate removal of

victims of trafficking back to their home countries, where they might be at risk of violence and even re-trafficking.⁵⁷

From the Republic of Ireland, *The Shadow Report from the Women's Human Rights Alliance* note that anecdotal evidence there suggests that trafficking is increasing. It cites Ruhama, an organisation that works with trafficked women: '*most women are not recognised as victims and are treated as illegal immigrants. Not given the necessary support for dealing with trauma, they are sent home, where there is a high likelihood of their being re-trafficked.*'⁵⁸

The Women's National Committee... argue for tighter provisions in law, support for victims and against the immediate removal of victims of trafficking back to their home countries, where they might be at risk of violence and even re-trafficking.

Section four: Trafficking in Northern Ireland⁵⁹

4.1 Immigration Crime assessments

Geographic distinction of Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland is distinct within the UK for its ease of access from both the UK and the Republic of Ireland. Police sources have noted the ease with which the land border can be crossed within Ireland and the apparent increase of the use of Northern Ireland, both as a route through to UK from the Republic and going the other direction, for all the forms of trafficking noted below. In December 2005, the website for the Organised Crime Task Force (comprising the Northern Ireland Office, Office of the Police Service of Northern Ireland, HM Customs and Excise, Inland Revenue, the National Criminal Intelligence Service, the Home Office and the Assets Recovery Agency, among others) suggests both the movement across borders of illegal immigrants and a recent increase. People have moved 'to Northern Ireland or use it as a transit route in both directions, between the Republic of Ireland and Great Britain.' According to this source, the use of this route has increased during 2004.⁶⁰

The Organised Crime Task Force assessment in 2003 noted that the numbers of trafficked people were likely to increase with the increase of direct flights from places like Paris, Frankfurt, Alicante and Malaga.⁶¹

Police analysis

Police sources in the North and South do not entirely concur with the pictures that emerge from analysis of the local press, below, or the people who were interviewed for this research. They seem to agree that there is a problem with exploited labour, but not necessarily with trafficking for the sex trade, for example.

The Organised Crime Task Force suggested that what we have called exploitative labour practices above has been an issue in Northern Ireland for several years. In 2003 they noted that '*a number of individuals based in Northern Ireland are involved in facilitating the trafficking of foreign nationals in the country for money. They will also find work and accommodation for these illegal immigrants—usually in exploitative, laborious, underpaid jobs with very poor living conditions.*'⁶² In 2004, a cross border assessment⁶³ noted the following points:

- exploitative work and accommodation arrangements for illegal immigrants
- evidence of exploitation of student and tourist visas into the country
- the reliance of a wide network of contacts outside Northern Ireland.

....a number of individuals based in Northern Ireland are involved in facilitating the trafficking of foreign nationals in the country for money.

Trafficking into the sex trade?

However, some of the assessment differs from the body of commentary that emerges below in the press and among individuals with experience of people who have been trafficked in Northern Ireland. With regard to 'escort agencies/ prostitution/lap dancing business' the cross-border assessment is that:

'there is no evidence to suggest any form of coercion or duress; all claim to be involved of their own volition as they can earn a reasonable wage.'

With regard to the links of prostitution to organised crime, the the same report suggests that there is '*limited evidence of organised criminality within either the Republic of Ireland or Northern Ireland.*' However the report does conclude that '*further investigation and analysis is required to establish the true scale of the problem.*'

4.2 Out of the Shadows

Aside from articles in the press, an unusual published resource touching directly on trafficking issues in Northern Ireland arose out of community based projects working with young people who are victims of sexual exploitation, both in prostitution and the production of pornography. A conference on the subject in April 2001, jointly organised between Include Youth and the South and East Belfast Health and Social Services Trust, was titled *Out of the Shadows—the sexual exploitation of children and young people*. The conference report was published⁶⁴ in April 2002. It suggests that:

*'Children and young people have been identified by Social Services working on the streets as prostitutes and perhaps more worrying (sic) offering sexual services to adults in hotels and other accomodation. Contact and control appears to be via mobile phone.'*⁶⁵

Further down, there is the suggestion that this activity may increase in the context of the wider peace process:

*'It is believed that the vacuum created by the end of the conflict and the onset of the peace process in Northern Ireland will encourage/facilitate a growth in the sexual exploitation of children. There is a need therefore for relevant agencies to take pro-active action to ensure that this will not be the history of post-conflict Belfast.'*⁶⁶

The meaning of the word 'vacuum' was not explained fully in this text.

This report also includes a section titled *General experiences of these issues amongst the delegates*. This appears to be a way of recording experiences whilst maintaining confidentiality of the contributors. Some of the points that were made are relevant to the arguments of this research, namely that, regarding the sexual exploitation of young people through prostitution:

- This is very organised and often crosses the Border.
- It has been proved to be very difficult to break away from, often because of fear.
- The entitlement is often not money, but goods or services.
- Court proceedings are a rare occurrence and therefore [this is] a hidden problem.
- Communities can be powerless to respond because of threats from powerful organisers.
- Drugs are often an issue, i.e. get involved to get money to buy drugs.
- The use of mobile phones makes the identification and detection of this abuse problematic.'

These points echo concerns that have been raised in a more general way in other literature: the fact that these activities cross borders and are controlled by fear, the hidden nature of the issue, the control by 'powerful organisers' and the use of technology as an aid to exploitation. These conference participants were describing not only individuals that were gripped by fear of organised networks but also communities.

4.3 Newspaper reports

When this research was started in November the response of many human rights activists, children's groups and others was that *'everyone thinks that trafficking is going on but there is no evidence.'*

This section of the paper argues that there is ample evidence to justify concern and further investigation and support. Below are reports that have been in the public domain over the last five years in two Belfast based newspapers.

These reports should be read with caution: news reports vary in accuracy. Sometimes there is little commitment to a wider context of, for example, gendered analysis of violence that affects women and girls and includes trafficking and coercion into the sex trade. Sources might be misquoted or their words are taken out of context. Or sometimes to grab the reader more effectively, language is used in ways that can heighten stereotypes and diminish dignity. Short phrases like 'sex slaves' are substituted, on occasion, for longer, more dignified descriptions like 'women coerced into prostitution.' Language leaves an impression, sometimes one that is felt rather than considered. The phrase 'sex slave' gives the impression of discussing someone who has been reduced and damaged. Women who have experienced this treatment might feel that they have in fact been reduced and damaged, but for everyone else, the latter phrase emphasises that the subject of the sentence is a person first. To take another example where language can hide greater

These activities cross borders and are controlled by fear, the hidden nature of the issue, the control by 'powerful organisers' and the use of technology as an aid to exploitation.

truths: Barnardos and other agencies working with children note that phrases like ‘child sex slaves’ or ‘child prostitutes’ obscure the fact that what is being described is in fact systemic child abuse.

However, with these caveats in mind, these reports should also be read in a context in which there has been scepticism that trafficking is happening at all in Northern Ireland. The picture that emerges from these reports in some respects matches the commentary of professionals in the interviews — it does appear to be happening.

The reports have been grouped into the following categories:

- 4.3A Trafficking in general
- 4.3B Debt bondage concerns
- 4.3C Trafficking women in the sex trade
- 4.3D Unaccompanied minors
- 4.3E Sexual exploitation of children
- 4.3F Demand and new technology to meet it
- 4.3G Involvement by criminal gangs

Some of the results below relate to events in the Republic of Ireland. These should be read in the context of reported ‘cross-border’ dimensions to the sex trade. These cross border dimensions arise with frequency in both media reports and the experiences of those who have encountered trafficked people in Northern Ireland.

4.3A Trafficking in general

The *Belfast Telegraph* reported one ruse to traffic people into Northern Ireland in 2002 in a report called *Gangs target Ulster college in Visas scam*.⁶⁷ The story suggested that networks ‘*trafficking in illegal immigrants have been targeting Ulster colleges to obtain travel documents to enter the UK... once they enter the country, the illegal immigrants are at the mercy of the gang*’.

In 2003, the *Irish News* reported the prosecution of 8 people running a human trafficking ring—connected to the deaths of 8 Turkish illegal immigrants when they were smuggled into Ireland in 2001. Thirteen illegal immigrants, including Albanians and Algerians had hidden on a container aboard a truck; and eight suffocated. The other five were discovered still alive, but critically ill, by a trucker near Wexford.⁶⁸

4.3B Debt bondage concerns

In 2004, there was an inter-agency investigation into a people trafficking network in Northern Ireland, centred on the allegation that up to ‘*100 foreign women were being smuggled by wealthy gangs every year to give birth, in the hopes of gaining Irish citizenship and a new life*.’ These young women, mainly Chinese, were kept in ‘*a network of safe houses, often in appalling conditions*’ and after giving birth were ‘*forced into an underworld of low-paid illegal employment, in some cases prostitution, to pay off massive debts to the criminal gangs behind the racket*.’⁶⁹ A spokesperson for the

Chinese Welfare Association said that Triad gangs were behind the racket. They were said to charge up to £20,000, half payable on departure, the other half due on arrival, an arrangement that left the young women open to exploitation. The UUP MP Rev Martin Smyth claimed to know of four houses being used in this way.

4.3C Trafficking women in the sex trade

In November 2001, the *Belfast Telegraph* reported *Garda probing Donegal vice ring: Pimp and sex workers in town*.⁷⁰ This article suggested that *'The garda is working with colleagues in Derry in relation to this matter as it believes that there is a cross border dimension to the operation.'*

The scandal over a lap dancing club in Botanic Avenue (2002) was the first notice that many in Belfast had of trafficking concerns. Belfast City Council did not renew the license on the grounds that the owner was under police investigation for the illegal trafficking of human beings. Esmond Birnie outlined his concerns in the *Telegraph* 19 November 2002.⁷¹ He writes of the girls and women involved,

'they are certainly not free agents and this is especially so for those who have been imported into the UK and Ireland from other parts of the world.... [The lap dancing clubs]... have become dependent on outsiders. Hence lap dancing encourages trafficking into Western Europe of vulnerable women from Eastern Europe and other disadvantaged parts of the world.'

In 2003, the *Irish News* reported that detectives raided 10 lap dancing clubs in Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway and Dundalk *'as part of a major crackdown on illegal immigration'* and that *'out of the 101 arrested 96 were women and five men.'*⁷² The news report suggests that they were charged under the Illegal Immigrants (Trafficking) Act and related legislation, but no one appears to have actually been charged with trafficking as a crime, rather with working *'in breach of employment permits.'*

In January 2004, the *Belfast Telegraph*⁷³ reported that Eastern European women were *'being smuggled across the Irish border to work in Belfast brothels'* and suggested that *'in the greater south Belfast area, detectives believed that loyalist terrorists hold a tight grip on the sex trade.'* As one source said, *'if it is not the paramilitaries running the operations themselves, they would be paid off by criminal gangs to allow them to set up.'*

In November 2004, Esmond Birnie MLA UUP raised concerns that the sex industry was growing in South Belfast, and claimed that the lap dancing club had employed women from Hungary, Venezuela, and Estonia; that the brothel in Lisburn Road used prostitutes from Russia and Germany, and that he had seen *'probable cases of sex workers moving back and forth across the Irish border according to where they could find work.'*⁷⁴ In the same year Robin Newton alleged that a brothel in the Belmont area of Belfast had young girls *'who are illegal immigrants'* who were working as *'virtual sex slaves.'*⁷⁵

'...lap dancing encourages trafficking into Western Europe of vulnerable women from Eastern Europe and other disadvantaged parts of the world.'

In July 2005, the *Irish News* reported the growing pressure on the Garda in the south to close down trafficking⁷⁶ suggesting that the *'number of foreign women being trafficked by criminal gangs to work in the sex industry was increasing rapidly.'* It noted that Ruhama Women's Project, a Dublin based organisation, had *'encountered 91 women who had been trafficked for this purpose and had managed to help 21 [women who had been trafficked] in the last two years.'*

In November 2005, the *Irish News* reported that a suspected brothel in South Belfast was shut down, and that two people *'recently appeared before the courts on brothel and people-trafficking charges.'*⁷⁷

In December 2005 the first trafficking charge was brought to court. The *Irish News* reported that a former teacher appeared in court charged with operating two brothels in the city centre, and a third charge of *'making arrangements for trafficking a woman on September 24.'*⁷⁸ At the time of writing the case is ongoing.

4.3D Unaccompanied minors

In 2003, the *Irish News* had reported that in the five previous years, a total of 2717 children had been referred to the East Coast Area Health Board after arriving in the state alone. Nine per cent were between 6 and 9 years old and a further nine per cent were five years old or younger. About one quarter of the total were aged 10 to 15 years and the remaining half of the total were between 16 and 18 years old.⁷⁹ In light of this, the Irish Refugee Council asked for policy and practical initiatives by the state to combat child trafficking.

In March 2005, the *Irish News* noted that:

*'It is a recognised reality that so called non-national men and women not only make up a large percentage of the state's service industry, working in restaurants, bars and hotels, but they have also provided lap dancing clubs and brothels with a steady supply of workers.'*⁸⁰

This report noted that 58 children had gone missing in the previous 12 months. In the first 3 months of 2005, children went missing who were originally from Somalia, Romania, Georgia, Nigeria and Moldova. The report quotes Fr Aquinus Duffy, founder of the www.missing.ws website.

'...If just one or two had disappeared I would agree that there was not a major problem but for 58 to go missing is very alarming....

*We need to find out how children are able to make their way to Ireland alone, who's helping them, and what happens to them after they go missing. Questions need to be asked about how organised this whole process is.'*⁸¹

In the Republic of Ireland, in patterns that echo the evidence gathered in England, reports noted the disappearance of children from state care. The Health Service Executive confirmed in November that over 250 children had gone missing from care *'and were being sexually exploited.'*

...58 children had gone missing in the previous 12 months.

The report is titled *Asylum children traded as sex slaves*. In it, Heilean Rosenstock-Armie, a Separated Children's Officer, says *'there is a lack of proper vision and lack of proper care because they are seeking asylum. Because they are not Irish is not seen as a childcare issue.'* She said that there was evidence to suggest that on average three separated children disappeared from care every month. And she said that there were indications that the vast majority of youngsters looking for refuge in Ireland had been trafficked.

4.3E The sexual exploitation of children

As long ago as July 1997, the *Belfast Telegraph* reported on research done by the Gay Men's Health Project in the Republic that there were *'Schoolboy prostitutes in Belfast'*.⁸² Teenage boys as young as 13 are working *'in cities including Belfast, Dublin, Cork and Limerick'* The report noted:

'Most of the men said they came from Dublin, but a small number were from Italy. The said research established that male prostitutes from Britain and Eastern Europe were also working in Ireland.'

In March 2000 the *Belfast Telegraph* reported⁸³ a *'province-wide child prostitution ring.'* This report was based on allegations that teenage girls as young as 13 from a residential home were involved in a prostitution racket.

In 2000, the press reported that a youngster of 12 was being sexually exploited: *'Mum speaks of horror as girl (12) is forced into vice ring'*⁸⁴ and detailed that *'her 12 year old had been sold to paedophiles willing to pay £150 for sex with a child.'* The report continued and suggested that this was a wider network: *'the victim's mum believes he could have 20 boys and girls under his control in Belfast.'*

In 2001 the *Belfast Telegraph* reported that *'Girls as young as 14 are targeted by pimps.'*⁸⁵ A leading charity, Barnardos, warned that the report corroborates two patterns that have emerged in research about other parts of the UK. First, *'This shock statistic comes in the wake of a government report which revealed last week that some crime gangs are involved in prostitution.'* Secondly, the report confirmed that the 'off street' phenomenon is also a problem in Northern Ireland as it continued, *'girls of school age who have become involved in sex for sale in the province tend to be vulnerable teenagers hidden in flats rather than on the streets as they are much more controlled by their pimps.'*

Another report in 2001 in the same paper quoted SDLP Assemblywoman Patricia Lewsley. She noted a cross border dimension to the issue of sexual exploitation, *'in particular how sex offenders could move freely and largely undetected across the Irish border.'*⁸⁶

In 2003,⁸⁷ the PSNI's Child Abuse and Rape Enquiry (CARE) team said that *'paramilitaries were involved in organising child sex rings, believed to involve young boys and girls, with the problem widespread throughout Northern Ireland.'* CARE unit chief Detective

Chief Inspector William McAuley revealed that up to 20 children, mostly girls, are being exploited, rather than coerced, into becoming prostitutes, with most paid in drugs.

'There have been a number of cases that have come to our attention over the past three years that would indicate there has been some organisation in using young (under 18) people for prostitution'

He said that there was growing evidence that paramilitaries were involved in prostitution but more recently child prostitution. The children's services manager of Barnardo's, Jacqui Montgomery Devlin warned that the extent of child sex rings being organised could be much wider than feared.

In February 2005, Detective Chief Inspector William McAuley said that:

*'We know from research carried out by both statutory and non-statutory child protection agencies that somewhere around 70% of child sexual abuse does not come to the attention of the police. Of those cases that are reported, only about 8% are cleared by way of criminal prosecution.'*⁸⁸

The Children's Commissioner Nigel Williams expressed concern about the issue of the sexual exploitation of young people in a reported exchanged in April 2005.⁸⁹

4.3F Demand and new technology to meet it

The trend to off-street prostitution is possible partly because of new technology, like the internet, where customers can link up with the 'market'. In May 2002 the *Belfast Telegraph* reported on the sales pitch of one internet site in a report called *Brothel franchises sold on net for £2,500*.⁹⁰ This article includes the sales pitch of the web-site manager to an undercover reporter:

' "For the price of putting one tiny written ad in the paper, you can have your own website, which people can view in private, with pictures of the girls, and all the information you need. And it will be accessed from all over the world by anyone looking to visit Belfast. We have been running this site as a dummy for just two weeks and it has over 1000 hits a day. And the phone numbers we posted on there have received over 150 calls a day. That's a lot of business for you," he boasted.'

The trends suggest that the infrastructure of the sex trade can be increasingly secretive in direct proportion to its increasing accessibility to customers. The internet can makes trafficked people harder to find (and count), much less offer options for safety and support.

4.3G Involvement by criminal gangs

The involvement of 'criminal gangs' in prostitution—including more recent reports of prostituting children and of women from other countries—has been a recurrent theme in the *Belfast Telegraph*

The trend to off-street prostitution is possible partly because of new technology, like the internet, where customers can link up with the 'market'.

reportage. Note that these allegations in the press below do not in themselves establish that women or children are working in coercive conditions in prostitution, or that they have been trafficked internally or externally for that purpose.

In 2000, the *Belfast Telegraph* reported the involvement of figures in the paramilitary world in prostitution⁹¹:

'Figures in the paramilitary world are reportedly involved in several other rackets including prostitution and drugs...many of those identified as running brothels in Belfast and other areas are so-called 'ordinary criminals.'

In March 2001, this was refined to *'80 Mafia-style gangs operating in Ulster'*⁹², raking in millions of pounds from organised crime in Northern Ireland, a government report revealed today. *'And more than half have links to paramilitary groups, either on the loyalist or republican sides, according to a threat assessment for the Organised Crime Task Force...they are running a host of rackets, including drug trafficking, extortion, cattle smuggling, vehicle theft and prostitution.'* The report continues, echoing concerns that globalisation has also increased the ease of financial transactions across borders: *'And they have developed sophisticated techniques to launder their profits, often spiriting them out of the country.'*

In 2002, the *Belfast Telegraph* noted the change in focus for criminal gangs to areas including *'illegal immigration networks.'*⁹³ According to the Organised Crime Task Force, the report said, *'the gangs are said to respond to successful crackdown in areas like fuel smuggling by turning to other crime, accounting for new concerns about prostitution, computer fraud and illegal immigration networks.'*

In 2002 a commentary in the *Belfast Telegraph* began: *'Crime Lords—many of them former paramilitary leaders—are bleeding businesses and communities dry.'* It continued, *'For years they have been raking in cash, using a wide variety of lawless methods—drugs, prostitution, protection rackets and smuggling.'*⁹⁴

In 2003, the *Belfast Telegraph* reported⁹⁵ that Loyalist feud victim Roy Green, who had been shot in Kimberley Street, *'was a drug-dealing gangster who ran a child prostitution ring in South Belfast.'* The report continued that he *'cashed in on schoolgirl hookers he ruled through terror.'* and that *'Green also ran a child vice den from a house in Roden Street.'*

In 2004, the *Belfast Telegraph* noted that a brothel that had been used by *'UDA thugs'* and had raised thousands of pounds for Mo Courtney had been put up for sale. *'Courtney and his henchmen has foreign hookers turning tricks at £100-a time.'*⁹⁶

In conclusion these press reports note some of the same trends identified in the more comprehensive research done in England (outlined in the previous section). For example, there is in the local news reports above:

- 1) concern about the growth of the sex trade in 'off street locations';
- 2) allegations that the sex trade (though not specifically trafficking) is closely linked with criminal gangs (in a local twist, with alleged paramilitary connections)
- 3) concerns about the rise in unaccompanied minors
- 4) the disappearance of unaccompanied children from care

In addition, these news report outline concerns about the systematic exploitation of young people who are born here.

4.4 Trafficking in Northern Ireland: written responses and interviews

People were interviewed on the understanding that they would be identified by role in a list (in methodology, appendix 2) that was separate to their responses to specific questions.⁹⁷

According to the definition in the Convention, there is trafficking between jurisdictions and within them, trafficking for the purposes of exploitation in the sex industry and trafficking for the exploitation of labour, and trafficking of adults and children. Given the definition in international law, concerns that emerged in this research fell into four categories, and sometimes an individual described would fall into more than one category:

- These press reports note some of the same trends identified in the more comprehensive research done in England.
- Adults who had been smuggled into the country and subjected to exploitative labour practices. This may or may not constitute trafficking according to the definition above. It seems to depend on the level of coercion and exploitation practiced.
- Women and girls who had been trafficked or smuggled into the country and appeared to be subjected to exploitation, usually in prostitution
- Unaccompanied minors from other countries who have increased in numbers in recent years, with many questions attached to their presence here and
- Children and young people born in Northern Ireland who are being systematically sexually exploited in Northern Ireland and/or moved into other jurisdictions for the purposes of sexual exploitation.

4.4A Trafficking in general

Definition

The people interviewed for this research sometimes described trafficking without naming it.⁹⁸ Most of the people who responded in interviews or in writing (with the exception of the researcher from the Human Rights Commission) were not aware of the broadest and most recent definition of trafficking.

Responses included the practical and brief: *'some mix of coercion and deception during the immigration process.'* The PSNI officer responded *'Yes, we use it when dealing with prostitutes if they are from inside or outside the UK.'*

Some respondents encountered trafficking within other frameworks, violence against women, child protection, asylum. For example:

'Trafficking is another form of abuse against women in relation to what I come across. It is not the trafficking that brings women to the door here, but the abuse, physical and sexual.'

'I didn't find a definition of trafficking, but we work with Child Protection issues, as in for people under 18 years old and the Children Order 1995.'

'My definition would be people brought in to be part of the sex industry. We would deal with people who are smuggled rather than trafficked for the purposes of prostitution. We have no working definition of trafficking. People who make their applications for asylum are making their applications under other definitions.'

The respondents were asked whether trafficking was a priority and whether this had changed in recent years. A clergyman said, *'when it arises it is an absolute priority.'*

A staff member from Women's Aid responded:

'Abuse of women has been my priority, but I was ignorant of the degree to which [trafficking] was happening. I can see the increase. It is going to get worse.'

A solicitor responded:

'About 3 years ago, I had 2 unaccompanied minors as clients, now it is more than doubled. Before 2003, all these were Chinese, by 2005, this group includes people from Somalia, Cameroon, Albania, and China among other places.' All of these clients were understood to be between 14 – 18 years old. This was a trend, s/he said, mirrored for other solicitors at the Law Centre. When asked whether there was cause to be concerned about trafficking with unaccompanied asylum seeking children, the response was, *'absolutely.'*

When asked whether there was cause to be concerned about trafficking with unaccompanied asylum seeking children, the response was, *'absolutely.'*

Numbers

The respondents were asked to give an estimate of the number of trafficked people (a possible minimum and maximum) that they had encountered in the last 3 years. This is not scientific or comprehensive, only a sense of the scale of the issue as they had encountered it. In light of the assertions that there is 'no evidence' of trafficking in Northern Ireland, the picture that emerges here is only a rebuttal of a fairly basic nature. More research would need to define this scope in any of the areas of concern identified.

The member of clergy had encountered two people who were trafficked.

The politician who responded to this questionnaire estimates that he has met and tried to assist about 20 people who have been trafficked.

A Women's Aid staff member working in Belfast estimated that she has encountered somewhere between 20 and 50 women who were trafficked from other countries. This figure includes women who may have been trafficked into Northern Ireland for the sex trade and those who might have arrived through other channels. For example, some women who find their way to Women's Aid have been married through internet arrangements and subsequently experienced domestic violence.⁹⁹ There have also been women who were referred to Northern Ireland from the rest of the UK to access safety and support here.

Additionally, a Women's Aid staff member estimates that she has worked with an additional 10 to 20 women born in Northern Ireland who had been trafficked internally.

A solicitor said s/he had worked with two women who had been trafficked for sexual exploitation. Additionally, there were 'many' who appear to have had labour exploited and perhaps experienced debt bondage.

A social worker interviewed said that there were about 10 to 20 unaccompanied minors with whom s/he had worked, probably closer to the latter. *'unaccompanied minors have been referred to me by immigration. With regard to young people born in Northern Ireland who have been sexually exploited, we have kept a rolling list of about 20 children.'*

Responses in the negative

Not everyone contacted reported that they had encountered trafficked people. For example, other people who might have encountered trafficked people reported no experience that they knew about, to date.

The Vice Squad in South Belfast PSNI responded in writing:

'[There is] new legislation which is untested. We in South Belfast have yet to meet someone who has been trafficked against their will. Our unit is new and we have no estimate as to how many are involved in this type of crime.'

...some women who find their way to Women's Aid have been married through internet arrangements and subsequently experienced domestic violence.

A community worker familiar with Portuguese speaking communities in mid-Ulster wrote:

*'Unfortunately (or fortunately) I don't personally know of any cases.'*¹⁰⁰

A staff member of the Multi-Cultural Resource Centre wrote:

*'I was working off the wrong definition. I was looking more at people smuggling. I am afraid I haven't come across any case of people trafficking to date. If we have met any victims as part of our visits to immigration detainees, they have not reported to us.'*¹⁰¹

Signs of trafficking

Some respondents noted the signs they noted as it became clear that an individual woman or child that had been trafficked:

'Vagueness of history. They are embarrassed or ashamed. Haven't got a clear history. Have to make something up. Also, the extreme lack of trust. And the fear that they will be punished in a statutory or law abiding setting. I think it's the vulnerability of women brought over here, and the isolation. We further isolate them because we don't have access to languages. Sometimes I go to Queen's [University] to get books, say in Croatian, just to deal with a woman.'

'There is a reticence in dealing with authorities. The nature of Asylum Seekers is that they are reliant on smugglers to get them out of the country.'

'The profile is 'young people who were model citizens, usually 13—14 year old good looking girls. Suddenly they become difficult, school is falling apart, criminal behaviour, they are missing home and they allege sexual assault. They are suddenly referred to various agencies; education boards for not attending school, the police for minor offences like shoplifting. I would believe that is the profile of young people being sexually exploited.'

Some respondents answered this question with signs they noted in the wider community:

'I see brothels and brothels joined with casinos and speak with young girls.'

'In my own constituency of South Belfast, growth in the sex industry and growing numbers involved from overseas.'

'Organized crime appears to be firmly rooted here, which is another indicator of trafficking. It appears that the level of awareness amongst people and the authorities here of trafficking is low, and this, coupled with an ambivalent attitude towards migrant workers/non-nationals and their welfare, may facilitate trafficking.'

Why people are trafficked

One respondent noted social factors that influenced trafficking in another area of his experience:

'As regards why people are trafficked, I can only give some information based on having lived in the Balkans. There, a combination of poverty, limited opportunity, lack of awareness among actual and potential victims, demand for paid sexual services, weak law-enforcement, low awareness amongst police and judiciary, a failure to recognize and acknowledge the problem, an attitude that women are to blame or that they choose to become sex workers, a paternalistic/misogynist, conservative society, low deterrence and high profits combine to make trafficking a very attractive business for criminals. I do not know Northern Irish society very well, but I am sure some of the same issues pertain here.'

Others offered explanations that highlighted specific aspect of the underlying causes, focussing on both economic and gender issues:

'People are trafficked to fill a gap in the sex trade.'

'Why? Profit for men. It is another form of slave labour. The abuse of women purely for money. Not only this generation of women but whatever children they have, the next generation.'

'It is another form of violence against women, the exploitation of women who are even more powerless than local women.'

'Poverty and desperation in the 'sending countries' and the demand generated in, for example, the Western sex industry. No doubt, parts of the low wage agri-food industry outside of Belfast perform a similar pull factor.'

'This is driven by economies rather than anything else, generally poorer countries, to Europe. Most people want to get out. The economic factor is very powerful. There is the desire for gain by those who manage trafficking and the girls believing they are going to a better life.'

'It is a huge financial industry. When people are fleeing a country it is the only means by which they can get out, and this is the response.'

'Profit for men. It is another form of slave labour. The abuse of women purely for money.'

4.4B Examples

Exploited labour and debt bondage

'Chinese were the main client base here until recently [when the client base has become more diverse rather than diminished numbers of Chinese]. Years ago clients who had come in via snakeheads [Triad organisations] were paying off debts to the gangs, sometimes thousands and thousands

of pounds. ...That may still be the case but people now are vaguer about their sources of funds, saying their money came from an uncle, for example.'

'Before there were changes in the law, there were packages charging outrageous money (maybe £6 to 10k each) to bring women here 2 weeks before giving birth, and then the women and babies disappeared. Health workers and interpreters noticed a huge increase in babies being born in the community. Some came from England and Scotland. The women thought that if they came over here their children would be entitled to a passport. It was pure exploitation though. They were housed in areas where there was a huge problem with racism. They were not entitled to a range of services. A lot of these girls went time and again to one house in South Belfast. I remember when people were being attacked in South Belfast, they were very close lipped about how they arrived here.'

'There is a certain level of trafficking, both of women and men. There seemed to spring up these Chinese 'consultancies' to set up the packages.'

'There is people trafficking here with undocumented workers in Belfast being employed and exploited. They could pay between 3 and 30k to get here.'

'There also seems to be a snakehead system tied into exploitative labour. Accommodation is tied to the job. People are not let out and not entitled to complain, they are not entitled to services.'

'Concerns about exploited labour of immigrants (undocumented) from Rumania, who found work in catering trade. Employers varied, but worst employers expected 12 hours work a day, no food, and no breaks. One employer fired employee with no notice and did not pay for the final month of work at all. These immigrants got here through Dublin.'

Trafficking women in the sex trade

'My first awareness was Estonian women who came here [to the lap dancing club]. There are 12 to 13 women have never been traced since then. They weren't deported. They disappeared into the ether. We were involved in a campaign because foreign women had been prostituted upstairs. It was worse than lap dancing... they had to deal with individual clients upstairs.'

'A young woman about 3 yrs ago came from a maternity ward after having a baby. She was from the Ukraine. Her English was ok. Came in under the guise of a student visa but hadn't done any studying. Eventually she told me that she had been brought over and since here had been prostituting (about 1 1/2 years). That would mean she was about 15 or 16 when she was brought over. That was a wake up call for me. I hadn't taken on that this was happening.'

'There are 12 to 13 women have never been traced since then. They weren't deported. They disappeared into the ether.'

'There was one women who had an Internet marriage, then she was trafficked for sex. She married someone from Scotland, she was originally from the Ukraine, don't know how she got here—someone must have brought her here-she escaped.'

'Another young woman who was also a minor when she came. English non-existent. Came from Nigeria maybe. Came to us via Social Services because she was pregnant. Her 2 aunts brought her over; they were running a brothel. There was an investigation. She had the baby, went into a life hostel, and was actually deported.'

'There was a case of young woman from an African country, persuade by a white woman of unknown nationality that there was a better job in Ireland. Travelled through Amsterdam and met by same white woman in Cork. Then passport and identity documents taken away, turned over to a man who picked her up and took her to a different city, from which she was prostituted for a year before she escaped. She describes a highly organised system in which she was living in flats with other young women (some of whom she thought were from Eastern Europe, some of whom spoke no English). She would be picked up by chaperoned limos and sometimes serviced up to ten punters a day at points all over the Republic. She was threatened with death if she did not comply. This was run on a substantial, organised basis to be able to fund the travel and the arrangements once she was in the country. This woman is in Northern Ireland now, but at risk if she is known.'

'For example, a woman who with her sister was raised in the country of origin—Nigerian I think—arrived here and couldn't go home because husband had been murdered and family was under threat. It took her 6–8 weeks to get here from Nigeria. She came here illegally, was raped on the boat, by one of the traffickers, and was brought to Scotland pregnant. In Glasgow she was abused and used as prostitute by man. Client took pity on her, I think he was a lorry driver, and got her to Northern Ireland and we got her. She called the man who brought her here her boyfriend. She was pregnant, hadn't been to maternity care at 7 months. No scan or check up. Immigration got her, and just called her a "tourist mother." She was illegal, so they weren't listening, and she was deported.'

Unaccompanied minors

[My first awareness of the issue was] in 1995 when the Immigration Authorities contacted us because a 14 year old boy from Darfur had arrived here via South Africa-whatever the deep water port is on the eastern coast- and somehow he had managed to travel to Belfast. He was in Belfast for months, and then sent home to Darfur. I was confused by how he paid for the voyage. 14 years old is probably the youngest I have

seen, but you have to ask this about all these kids. Where do they get the money? That is the child protection question. They are arriving here supposedly not knowing anyone, and then they disappear—sometimes missing for 2 or 3 days—and then come back. Sometimes seem to have another source of money. You get the impression that someone else is managing the child. To get into the scene [sex trade] very fast you would have to know someone. That would go for a lot of the kids. There is an existing network they contact. We can't find out about it. It is very secretive.'

'Unaccompanied asylum seeker children have become more varied and larger in numbers. Why? I don't understand it. Perhaps because a clearer route has opened up into Northern Ireland.'

'There was a young Somali woman who went missing a few years ago. We had no interpreter for her. Her family members had been killed. She was here for about 2 months, then disappeared. Real concerns that she had been taken by a smuggler.'

'Case of a young girl from West Africa, trafficked by a White European man to Northern Ireland after he and others had introduced her into the sex trade for about 2 years in her country of origin.'

'How does an unaccompanied minor they get through security at airports and arrive with no documents? They are untraceable, these young people. You would think people would trace them.'

Young people who are sexually exploited

'I am also concerned about young people who are living in their communities who are involved in sexual exploitation. The numbers are not huge but they don't have to be... Young people are saying that there is paramilitary involvement in their coercion. Young woman who had a gun held to her head because she wasn't to tell anyone; but told what was going on. "You can't possibly protect me" she said. Children have become at times 'the sexual plaything of paramilitaries; picked up in a car and sexually assaulted by whoever is in the car. A statement about sexual assault might be made, but later retracted.'

'We are concerned about trafficking from care homes but we get them back fast. If we suspect or other exploitation we act very fast... We all know that there is coercion, but young people see it as free will. That is partly because, for example, of the grooming process; a process of making them feel that they have made the choice themselves. The coercion doesn't come across... but emotionally and developmentally [children under 18] are not capable of making that decision. Their choices are not choices.'

'How does an unaccompanied minor they get through security at airports and arrive with no documents?'

'Their choices are not choices'

4.4C Routes

On this island:

'I know of probable cases of backwards and forwards across the land border.'

'... Some people arrive from the south to avoid paying the money back to smugglers/traffickers there.'

'From Dublin. And they fly into international airport (but this is less).'

'...illegally, from the Republic: police have brought women here from the train station.'

'Young people are taken from Belfast to Dundalk and Waterford. Numbers are difficult.'

In context of the answer this refers to prostitutes in general rather than trafficked people:

'Most of our call girls come from England or up from Dublin. They travel either by plane or train.'

Across other borders:

'A lot through the docks, more than a year ago.'

'[They arrive] by boat and plane.'

Countries of origin

'Baltics, Eastern-Central Europe and Central Asia.'

'From Nigeria, Sri Lanka, Ukraine, Jamaica, Bangladesh.'

'Chinese women, but that tends to be marriages to Chinese men.'

'They come from Eastern Europe more in the last 2 years; Latvia and Estonia; about 4 to 5 years ago there were more Albanians.'

'There has been a sprinkling of Africans.'

'Existing legislation is not enough.'

4.4D Whether existing legislation is adequate

'Existing legislation is not enough. If people get in by any means, legal and illegal, there must be legal mechanisms to handle their cases as soon as possible. Now, they are in no man's land, because they are invisible, totally vulnerable and exploitable. There needs to be action by government to ensure that this changes. Also, the Ukrainian woman who resigned from factory in Coleraine thought she'd lost entitlement to legal protection and be deported. After she left her job, she was thrown out of her tied house, and wandered for 2 weeks outside. Eventually she had to have both legs amputated because of frostbite. This would not have happened if she had felt she could have gone to the police or an agency.'

'Doubt it though I understand the 2003 Sexual Offences Act may have improved things a bit.'

'Obviously the legislation is not adequate or there is not the will to deal with this. Sometimes it is a matter of political will and not what is on the statute books.'

'The 2002 Immigration Act is relevant, section 145; the offence of trafficking for the purposes of prostitution has a penalty of 14 years. Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants etc) Act 2004 created a new offence of trafficking people for exploitation mainly targeting those gang masters and snakeheads who make profit from bringing people to the UK to work as debt slaves. This act also makes it an offence to not produce a passport at an asylum interview although it does contain statutory defence against this charge.'

'We are in the process of testing this legislation. The first case in the province [is in] South Belfast.'

'The existing legislation in the UK does not, on the basis of my limited knowledge at this time, operate as a sufficient deterrent. Legislation is only ever as good as its enforcement, however. One of the key problems generally is the criminalization of victims, where they are often seen as illegal immigrants rather than trafficked persons. A Directive of the Council (2004/81/EC) provides for the issuance of temporary residence permits to victims who agree to act as witnesses in prosecutions of traffickers. This would help address the problem that victims are often deported, so that prosecutions do not go ahead. Witness protection measures are also relevant, both for victims/witnesses and their families as necessary. International cooperation is very important in this regard. In addition, projects to provide micro-credits and repatriation assistance to victims are very useful. The new Council of Europe Convention does provide for some offences to be created in domestic systems – for example in Articles 18 and 19. However, issues such as proving beyond a reasonable doubt that a person knew that a sex worker was actually a victim of trafficking are very difficult to resolve in practice.'

'In England the vice squads don't have to get a statement from the young person in order to prosecute. Here that is not the case; they still have to get a statement from the young person.'

'We try various ways of keeping young people safe, from secure accommodation to telling them that we know where they are and will run with it, according to their maturity, development and cognitive ability. No specific piece of legislation would fit everyone. Each young person is an individual and requires an individual approach. But statutes need a range of options and resources they can access to keep young people safe.'

'International cooperation is very important...'

How conviction rates could be increased

'The police etc. do need to take this issue very seriously.'

'A variety of measures could be used to increase conviction rates. Adapting UK legislation to the Council of Europe Convention and applicable UN conventions and protocols would help. Awareness-raising amongst police and judiciary/prosecution would also be useful. It appears that this awareness is low and the seriousness of the problem and the devastating effect it has on people's lives is just not known here.'

'How trafficked victims can be assisted in their protection, rehabilitation and repatriation'

'By the recognition of it, first. Life [is] made easier that it's not a threat that they will be immediately deported. Women may be in prostitution, but they still don't want to be deported. Deportation is still women's main fear.'

'Obviously they should be treated more as victims than criminals. This was my thinking re: the Oksana Sukhanova case—my view was, to the extent she did have to pay a \$3000 "fee" to get here that she was really trafficked and the normal migrant worker scheme had been "corrupted". The latter comment referred to the case of woman who contracted frostbite in Coleraine after living rough, and had both legs amputated.'

4.4E Roles of police/statutories and NGOs

The role of police in combating trafficking

A police officer working in the vice squad responded in writing:

'We ask all the girls how they got into NI and were they driven or given money to work in Belfast. Signs? These are hard to detect and if we can we try to get the girl to hand over her ticket and any receipts she may have been given.'

Some respondents felt encouraged by police action:

'The police are working on hate crime and racism issues and trafficking will follow.'

'My impression is that they are now trying very hard (and I commend them for that) whereas 3-4 years ago they would have treated this issue as a marginal concern.'

There was, however, in some cases concern expressed about perceived attitudes or priorities in the police:

'Police don't believe this is happening. Even with statements, as with any sexual offence it is one's person's word against another. Only one in ten would be prosecuted. It is only through surveillance, and evidence through other methods

*'Signs?
These are hard to
detect...'*

that conviction rates could be increased. But we will never get a statement because of the fear. If there is traffic it is undoubtedly controlled by the paramilitaries. They have the power. More importantly they have the guns and the hurley bats. They also control communities. The stranglehold on local communities is well documented... They control who does what, who says what and who lives here. If they say they don't have the evidence, I don't understand why. They have been collecting soft evidence on everyone in Northern Ireland. They have the CCTVs. They could track people. The police know when they want to know, if it is of interest to them.'

There were also concerns expressed that the police may restrict their role to the enforcement of immigration laws:

'Re: the police role [I] would like greater clarity regarding their role as opposed to that of the Immigration Service.'

'I don't know that [trafficking] is recognised here as the problem that it is. If they are here under a visa that has been breached that that (breach) would be looked at.'

'I don't think police see themselves as having a role except in enforcing immigration legislation. We talked to the Vice Squad (at their invitation to meet) and prostitution was an issue for them, but there is no idea how to interview women to decide what level of consent there is there. If they are just asking "Do you want to be here or sent home," then women are going to say "Yes, I want to be here." Women are very rarely spoken to alone. The CARE (Child Abuse and Rape Enquiry) units have been under funded since the Patten report. There has to be cooperation in the units in the force; the CARE unit should be doing the interviewing. The police don't make it a priority to deal with our own women and children who are born here, what hope is there for women who come here from somewhere else?'

'The police role is to use all methods possible to counteract and eradicate the problem of trafficking. The police should be going undercover. They are far too concerned with peoples' status. Are you here illegally or not? They should be saying, 'Here is someone who is here illegally: how did this happen?' These young girls are discovered in brothels and the whole emphasis is on their status and where they are illegal instead of treating them as victims.'

'We were on Adelaide Street near City Hall, 2 or 3 of the fancy new flats are brothels...we were slowing down to look for a parking space there and women were shouting at us. Would that be a police role [to stop that prostitution]? But prostitution is so blatant. Are they looking at breaking the law in prostitution or the source of it?'

'I don't know that [trafficking] is recognised here as the problem that it is.'

The role of social services

‘Children should be assessed for their needs: education and social, but if social workers are busy and not properly trained it won’t happen. Some kids who only speak Chinese are placed with foster parents in the country [who only speak English].’

‘Counselling should be standard for a young child: Social Services should be trained and brought up to date with practices. There is no joined up thinking.’

‘The NI children Order 1995 is relevant (especially with regard to Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children). Adults need support, counselling, network of interpreters and communication. How much more children?’

The role of non-governmental organisations

‘Organisations like the Rape Crisis Centre and Women’s Aid need more research and training on the issues. There are a wide variety of issues affecting women not born in this country—trafficking, female genital mutilation, forced marriages—but we don’t have the skills to deal with these issues’.

‘Maybe we should be collaborating more with each other as NGOs to say that this is happening.’

4.4F Difficulties

‘Resources. [Lack of resources, low staffing, inadequate legislation] All of these!’

‘Because of the language barrier I don’t get the opportunity to talk to women to get to the core of women’s experience. The translator is not translating the empathy there.’

‘Government policy which tends not to recognise the enormity of the problem with regard to sexual violence and abuse in the Northern Ireland, which includes trafficking. There is at present no policy on combating sexual violence.’

‘We put ourselves in jeopardy by speaking out.’

‘We put ourselves in jeopardy by speaking out.’

4.4G Demand and new technology to meet it

The respondents were asked, with regard to the sex trade, ‘Who are the customers? How do the customers find out about it?’ Their responses included the following:

‘The customers are mostly middle class men according to most of the women we have worked with—educated, professional men. After there were a series of attacks on prostitutes by one man several years ago, this is what five or six other women told us.’

'Who are the punters? Who has enough money to pay for it? They have to have well paid jobs, be quite powerful, or be the ones who are reaping the profits from it...We know that paramilitary commanders like young girls. Young people would tell us this ' The respondent confirmed that this had been reported to him/her on a number of occasions by young people.'

'One woman we know places an advert in a magazine to get customers; she was horrendously attacked by several men. This is not safe.'

'Most forms of technology are being used against women. There was a case where a woman was drugged and taken to a flat and raped, and she cannot be sure but she believes that credit card details were being taken, and it was shown live on the internet.'

4.4H Trafficking networks and criminal gangs

The respondents were asked whether they believed that paramilitary groups were involved in trafficking activity. They responded in a variety of ways, from confident assertions that there was paramilitary involvement on both sides to describing experiences that related to specific paramilitary groups and finally, to noting that there was not clear evidence.

'I have no clear evidence on much of this. [There] do seem to be Northern Ireland –Republic of Ireland linkages in some cases (e.g. in sex industry), also hearsay about Triads etc. (one case in N. Belfast).'

'Certainly there have been people with paramilitary backgrounds involved in child abuse. It is impossible to prove. The answer has been to export young women to safe places in England.'

'I hear that there are operations going on between paramilitaries and triads—but if you talk about it you would be hunted down. There were also allegations that paramilitaries were operating cartels on house rentals. There were rumours that paramilitaries and triads were working together to sell these 'packages [for women about to have babies].'

'There has to be an element of organisation to all this. There have to be networks, and an international network. Otherwise, where do young people get the contacts to come here? Or the money? Nothing happens in this country—drugs, extortion, or whatever—that hasn't got paramilitary fingers on it, or is not licensed by paramilitaries. Maybe other people bring in cigarettes or fuel, but the paramilitaries get their cut. They might say 'we don't sexually exploit children' but they get a cut. Nationalist and Loyalist paramilitaries are both involved.'

'Women are prostituted via paramilitaries. People they know who turned out to be paramilitaries pimping them (under) paramilitary threat. No choice. Mostly with loyalist paramilitaries. I haven't heard of it from nationalist. This is more sinister because you are talking about a very large community. For many women who come here, paramilitaries are their protection. That's their protection taken away. No place in Belfast is safe. They would go to Scotland and England from here.'

'The paramilitary involvement has been on both sides.'

Section 5: Conclusions

This research was done over the period of one month, It had a very limited remit: to scratch the surface of trafficking in Northern Ireland, to shape, if it were merited, a submission to the Joint Committee on Human Rights on the nature and extent of trafficking in Northern Ireland. On the basis of this exercise, if it were merited, the purpose was also to provide some arguments and evidence within an international and regional framework, for campaigners who want to end violence against women.

The research started with the premise that NGOs and official sources said that there was no hard evidence of trafficking in Northern Ireland. However, there does appear, from 'scratching the surface' to be grounds for concern that trafficking is indeed happening in this jurisdiction—without recognition, either officially or in the non-governmental and community sector. This is an under-researched area. This paper begins to argue that there are grounds for concern about some forms of trafficking. However, it does not attempt to define the scope of the problem, or judge the numbers of people involved.

Scratching the surface in Northern Ireland meant two sorts of activities:

- 1) Looking at what was in the public domain in two newspapers in one city and
- 2) Investigating the experiences of a few professionals who might have had contact with trafficked people.

The result is a preliminary report produced by one person working at odd hours part-time, and for free, over several weeks. There are sufficient grounds for concern to suggest that a more determined political will and resources to encourage further investigation might yield more: expertise from the government policy makers, police, immigration service, social services and other statutory bodies could confront this issue more directly, comprehensively and effectively. In turn, this might increase the chances for the women and children who have been trafficked to find options for safety and support.

Scratching the surface in one part of Northern Ireland reveals that there are four areas of concern:

Adults who had been smuggled into the country and subjected to exploitative labour practices. This may or may not constitute trafficking according to the definition above. It seems to depend on the level of coercion and exploitation practiced. While this study has not had the resources to examine this in depth, there is an emerging literature on migrant worker concerns in the North and south of Ireland that addresses this issue.

Women and girls who had been trafficked or smuggled into the country and appeared to be subjected to exploitation, including in prostitution (both a women's Aid staff member and a politician for one area, South Belfast, estimate that they have encountered over

20 women, (between 20 and 50 for the Woman's Aid staff member) in the last three years. In addition, the Women's Aid staff member estimated she had encountered between 10 and 20 women born in Northern Ireland who had been internally trafficked.

Unaccompanied minors from other countries who have increased in numbers in recent years, with many questions attached to their presence here (in one Health and Social Services Board area, noted increasing and concerning numbers of children arriving, in parallel with both the Republic and the UK mainland), and

Children and young people born in Northern Ireland who are being systematically sexually exploited in Northern Ireland and/or moved into other jurisdictions for the purposes of sexual exploitation. (In one Health and social Services Board area, there is a rolling list of about 20 children).

None of these estimates is systematic.

None of these estimates is systematic. Neither does this research take into account experiences that others may know about in Newry, Derry, Coleraine, Cookstown, Dungannon or Fermanagh, for example. Each of these other areas has specific geographic circumstances and migration patterns that might affect trafficking patterns and allow a fuller picture to emerge 'out of the shadows.'

But even the estimates show that there is cause for concern and that there should be further commitment of time and resources to this issue.

But even the estimates show that there is cause for concern and that there should be further commitment of time and resources to this issue. The press reports note activity in all four types of trafficking. Most of the respondents noted that the levels of which they were aware, in the first three of the four types of trafficking at least, was increasing.

Home Office research also cited a worrying low level of awareness and commitment to combating trafficking issues among police officers around the UK. Although this awareness and commitment appears to be growing in Northern Ireland, police sources themselves suggest that their information is patchy and requires much more thorough investigation in this jurisdiction.

The UK wide research noted also that statutory services were not always equipped to identify and support children who may have been trafficked. This concern has been echoed by professionals in Northern Ireland.

In the Northern Ireland context, organised crime is closely linked to paramilitary activities, and it appears that both may be increasingly linked to illegal immigration and the control of the sex trade. These links have not been proven but they may be at the heart of the law enforcement issues that trafficking raises here. In this context, the perceived priority of the police to focus on immigration crime and the individual who has been trafficked rather than the larger systems behind trafficking is concerning. In this context, the perception among police that prostitution in Northern Ireland is largely a consensual activity is concerning. It could lead to a diminished commitment to find and support those in the sex trade more generally for whom their activities are not consensual. Both of these implications for

Northern Ireland follow also from the Home Office research that suggests that in practice there is a low level of commitment among police officers to identify trafficked people, or combat the crime.

Finally, non-governmental and community sector groups need to be involved in this process. It became evident in this research, partial though it was, that even those who had encountered trafficked people did not always recognise some forms of trafficking. Nearly everyone who was contacted for this research was interested to know more; about what trafficking is, the nature and extent of trafficking here, and how to offer support to people who had been trafficked.

Victims of trafficking will not always choose to share their experiences with the police, for a variety of reasons. Individuals who are involved with religious groups, trade unions, human rights groups, women's groups, community groups, children's groups, anti-racist organisations, and groups that support refugees and asylum seekers may have a greater opportunity to build relationships of trust with people who have been trafficked. They may therefore be in positions to identify trafficked people and (with great care: see the resources below) help provide them options to find safety and support.

The possible connections of criminal networks in trafficking mean that awareness and involvement of individuals or organisations also carries an element of risk. Those who are concerned about the issue are advised to consider measures for their own safety and support as well as the safety and support of those they seek to assist.

Individuals and organisations might also consider their advocacy work on a broader level, to challenge and change the wider perceptions of violence against women and girls, including the trafficking of women and children. Trafficking in all its forms violates core beliefs and values of churches, synagogues, mosques, and temples, human rights groups, women's groups, community groups, children's groups, anti-racist organisations, refugee and asylum seeker support groups, trade unions, and any who wish to provide support, or build political coalitions within ethnic minority communities. These groups might consider political lobbying work, as recommended below, to stop this comprehensive violation of human dignity.

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identify trafficked
people and help
provide them options
to find safety and
support.

Section 6: Recommendations

For anyone concerned with trafficking in any of its forms, as law enforcement issue or an issue of providing support and safety for vulnerable people, this research poses some challenges. Now the 'bar needs to be raised' on this issue: raised awareness, a higher degree of commitment to safety and support for victims, and more resources within the wider framework of an integrated strategy to end violence against women. The argument of this paper is that the preliminary research above is sufficient case for:

- 1) A higher recognition of trafficking as a problem
- 2) A higher awareness of the forms that trafficking can take
- 3) A higher commitment to safety and support—including to getting the skills needed to provide safety and support—for the increasing numbers of women, children and men who are being trafficked into and within this country
- 4) A better legal framework for making perpetrators of violence and abuse accountable to the law and
- 5) More political will and resources to stop the demand side of the sex trade that provides customers for women and children (and it is overwhelming women and children) who are daily abused.

Experts on trafficking make a vast number of recommendations about training, support, legal structures and other issues. UNICEF suggests a broad number of areas with regard to children (that pertain to women too) that should be addressed.¹⁰² The recommendations below use those recommendations as a starting point and are adapted and expanded for the Northern Ireland context:

Attitudes that provide the foundation for all forms of violence against women and girls should be challenged wherever they occur. These include 'beliefs about the role of girls,' or the belief that prostitution is largely 'consensual,' or a 'victimless' crime. Social indifference to forms of violence against women and girls should be challenged.

Governments need to show a strong commitment to combat trafficking: to ensure that the necessary legislation is in place, the resources are there, and the training has been done to equip the major players with the knowledge and skills they need.

The UK government should sign the *Draft Convention against Trafficking*, and reform national legislation for more accountability of perpetrators.

Laws need to be in place and reliably enforced: laws should not punish people who have been trafficked. Trafficking laws need a human rights focus. They need to put the interests of the trafficked person first and treat victims as victims. These laws would include a period of reflection for recovery from initial trauma,

and determination of the case for prosecution and the role of the victim in building that case. They would also include provision for education and training for rehabilitation and employment for victims of trafficking.

Research (by any of a number of government departments) needs to determine the extent and nature of trafficking in Northern Ireland as well as trends and numbers. This research should include more information on the demand side of the trade for trafficked people and how it can be minimised or stopped.

The government should work with UK bodies to develop an integrated strategy to combat violence against women that specifically includes anyone in statutory or NGO sectors who may encounter those who are trafficked. This should promote the best ways to provide options for safety and support for women and children (largely) who have been trafficked.

Immigration and law enforcement officers should receive training: relevant officers in police, immigration and other branches represented in the Organised Crime Task Force should use the material developed by the Home Office toolkit for example: *Crime Reduction Toolkits: Trafficking People*, Home Office, London, 2005.

Relevant government departments should provide financial support for community and voluntary sector to access training that is available to anyone in statutory or NGO sectors who may encounter those who are trafficked. This should promote the best ways to provide options for safety and support for women and children (largely) who have been trafficked.

Relevant government departments should provide financial support for organisations who have been engaged in assisting people who have been trafficked. This support would recognise that survivors of trafficking may need special assistance; interpreters and counselling, for example, as well as material assistance, awareness of their legal options, and training. Financial support should take into account the reality that accessing support and realising safety may take longer and be more expensive, for women who are contending with multiple disadvantages like insecure immigration status, and language barriers.

Governments and NGOs are working on the issue in other countries too so that women and children need to be aware of the dangers of trafficking so that they can protect themselves. There are many methods. For example, women who have escaped trafficking have suggested that leaflets be made available by campaigners to end violence against women in, for example, the British Embassies of different countries where internet brides have to get their visas.

In Northern Ireland, the community and voluntary sectors should take steps so that all those who may interact and work with people who have been trafficked can respond appropriately to increase their options for safety and support.

Trafficking in all its forms violates core beliefs and values of churches, synagogues, mosques, and temples, human rights groups, women's groups, community groups, children's groups, anti-racist organisations, refugee and asylum seeker support groups, trade unions, and those who wish to provide support, or build political coalitions within ethnic minority communities.

Interested people from any of these types of organisations in Northern Ireland should access and download the 'Identification protocol' that Anti-Slavery International and others have recently published to assist the tasks of offering options of safety and support to people who have been trafficked, as in the bibliography below.

Providing safety and support for children and adults who have been trafficked is a matter of individual sensitivity, but it is also a matter for political advocacy. If this limited research is an indication, organisations and individuals who are concerned with the victims of trafficking will be drawn into questioning the wider context in which trafficking can flourish without recognition or challenge.

Appendix 1: What trafficked people may have experienced

From the Home Office Crime Reduction Toolkit:

Trafficked women are particularly vulnerable and likely to have suffered considerable abuse of their human rights.

They are likely to be suffering from the shock of having expected to be working and making money to improve their and their family's situation, only to find themselves in the control of their exploiters with very little opportunity to escape.

They may have suffered from abusive transit, having been sold several times.

They often have no legal status and no papers, so will be worried about what may happen to them if they come into contact with the authorities.

They are working in an illicit or covert sector where they may be subject to abuse, exposed to health risks, and risks to their personal safety.

They may have limited personal freedom, may be moved around the country and sold from one exploiter to another. Alternatively, they may be subject to less obvious forms of control.

They are often subjected to physical, sexual, and emotional abuse by their exploiters, along with continual further threats.

They will typically be in some sort of debt bondage to their exploiters.

It is likely that they will be suffering from various forms of trauma.

They may have adopted, or been encouraged into, coping strategies including dependence on drugs or alcohol.

The trauma suffered by children is arguably greater—given a child's basic need for adults they can trust, and for care and protection.

Appendices

Appendices

Appendix 2: Methodology

The safety of trafficked people, and people working for their safety and support, has been a paramount consideration in this research. Details that may identify vulnerable people, either sources in interviews or trafficked people, have been omitted/disguised.

The areas the Joint Committee wanted evidence about were:

- 1) the nature and extent of trafficking in the UK
- 2) the extent to which the UK legal framework is adequate to address the problem
- 3) the enforcement of the law on trafficking
- 4) the treatment and protection provided to victims of trafficking
- 5) the law and practice on the deportation of victims of trafficking.

Preliminary inquiries suggested that finding statistics would be hard. As one researcher said, 'There is absolutely no hard evidence of trafficking in any figures or prosecutions...which leaves it very difficult to gauge.'¹⁰³

Given this reality, the proposal was made that we might be able to identify the 'tip of the iceberg' if there was an iceberg in Northern Ireland, by identifying where a range of 'professionals' have encountered trafficking and trafficked people. This could be supplemented by a literature search and the results of recent (last five years) events that have been in the public domain (especially news stories). These two methods would be a start to answering questions 1 and 2 above.

The author started by asking colleagues in human rights groups, children's rights groups, women's groups and others for advice about whether there had been published work on trafficking in Northern Ireland and whether someone from those areas was developing the evidence for the Joint Committee on Human Rights. Following the work of Carron Somerset, leads were also sought for people who might come into contact with trafficked people as part of their work, in 3 broad areas:

- 1) NGOs or statutory staff who might offer advice or support to trafficked people
- 2) police and immigration officers and
- 3)'observers' like academics, journalists, or politicians.

After a literature search to establish conceptual and legal frameworks, and develop methodology further, the author used a questionnaire that was developed in England to approach about 20 people whose job roles might allow them contact with trafficked people (the method of attribution also follows that in the English research). There were about 10 in-depth responses, and other brief responses to this enquiry.

Others were concerned with the issue but unable to respond in the time available. The author tried to the best of her ability to follow the most recent ethical guidelines for research of the British Sociological Association.

Internet based searches were done on for local and regional news stories. People were interviewed and notes sent back to them for them to check for safety and accuracy, or to add comments.

People interviewed:

Member of clergy, Church of Ireland, 12 December, 2005

Director, Rape Crisis Centre, 12 December, 2005

Solicitor, the Law Centre, 6 December, 2005

Staff, Chinese Welfare Association, 9 December, 2005

Team Leader, Belfast Women's Aid, 5 December 2005

Youth Worker, South & East Trust/Barnardos, 9 Dec, 2005

People who sent back written information

Researcher, Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, 15 Dec, 2005 (His views and experience are not official Commission statements).

Clare O'Mahony, Good Shepherd Sister working in city centre Belfast, 6 December, 2005 (name used by permission)

Detective Inspective, Community Safety Unit, PSNI, 14 December, 2005

Esmond Birnie, UUP, 8 December, 2005 (name used by permission).

Attempts were made to contact appropriate spokespeople on the issue in each of the main parties, but only one response was received, from Esmond Birnie, UUP, who gave his permission for his name to be used.

About 20 other individuals from academia, church groups, women's sector, children's sector, human rights organisations, healthcare, interpreting services, community organisations, a trade union, and organisations concerned with ethnicity and immigration issues responded with leads, briefer written information and expressions of concern and interest in the topic. Some of their responses are also quoted here.

Their responses have been grouped into the following categories:¹⁰⁴

4.4A Trafficking in general:

- Definition?
- Is it a priority/has this changed?
- Estimates of numbers of trafficked people you have encountered in last 3 yrs?

- What are the signs of trafficking (in individuals)?
- What are the signs of trafficking in communities?
- What are the push/pull factors that contribute to trafficking?

4.4B Some of the examples given about the areas of concern

- Exploited labour and debt bondage
- Trafficking women in the sex trade
- Unaccompanied minors
- Sexual exploitation of children

4.4C Routes: What are the routes that trafficked people have used?

4.4D Legislation: is it adequate? How could conviction rates be

increased?

4.4E What is the role of the police/statutories/non-governmental organisations?

4.4F What are the difficulties you face in your work?

4.4G Demand and new technology to meet it

4.4H Involvement of criminal gangs

Limited responses due to time

Attempts were made to contact organisations in Dublin and London who would have more information about routes into and out of Northern Ireland, but no response was received in the time available.

A more comprehensive piece of research along these lines would contact more staff in Women's Aid around Northern Ireland, other community groups, academics, lawyers, and journalists as well as make contact with further statutory agencies and hospitals (e.g. maternity wards), immigration officials, other branches of the police, and trade unions, for example, for their experiences. More work needs to be done to see how other areas of the country, outside Belfast and especially borders and port areas, have been affected.

Early drafts were read by a number of colleagues involved in research and advocacy on human rights issues, to whom the author is deeply indebted for suggestions to improve the material. However, the responsibility for any errors are the author's.

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developed at the United Nations level: *'to Prevent, suppress, and Punish Trafficking in persons, especially women and children, supplementing the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organised Crime'* One advance in this protocol is that it affirms that *'it is the exploitation, not the transport of a victim that matters.'* The Coalition argued on that basis that *'sexual exploitation is actionable, both when it happens to women who have been trafficked into a country and when it happens to women within a country.'*

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