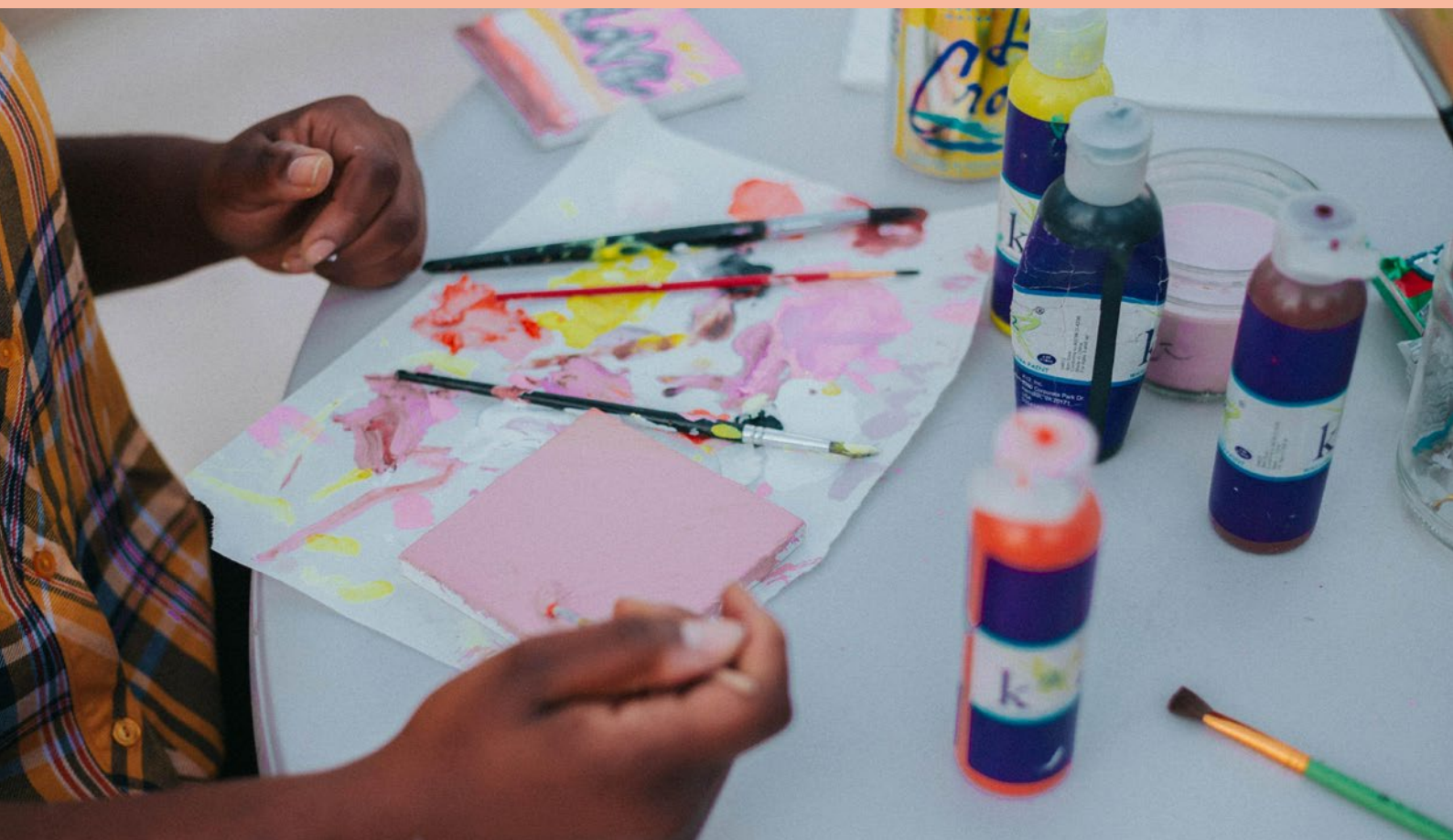


# Creating stable futures: human trafficking, participation and outcomes for children

## Research Summary

October 2022

Authors: Dr Patricia Hynes (The Helena Kennedy Centre for International Justice at Sheffield Hallam University), Dr Helen Connolly (Institute of Applied Social Research at the University of Bedfordshire) and Laura Durán with Patricia Durr, Elias Matar and Pandora Haydon (ECPAT UK).



Research by:

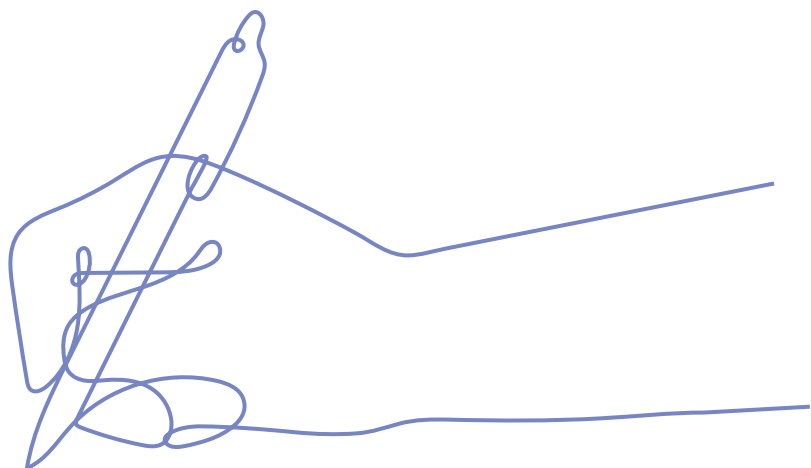
This is a summary of the report: *Creating Stable Futures: Human Trafficking, Participation and Outcomes for Children*, a Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre (the Modern Slavery PEC) research project, funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council. The research was conducted by Dr Patricia Hynes, The Helena Kennedy Centre for International Justice at Sheffield Hallam University, Dr Helen Connolly, Institute of Applied Social Research at the University of Bedfordshire and Laura Durán with Patricia Durr, Elias Matar and Pandora Haydon of ECPAT UK.

The full report can be accessed on the Modern Slavery PEC website at [www.modernslaverypec.org/resources/childrens-outcomes](http://www.modernslaverypec.org/resources/childrens-outcomes).

The Modern Slavery PEC has supported this independent research project and worked closely with the research team to produce this Research Summary. However, the views expressed in this summary and the full report are those of the authors and not necessarily of the Modern Slavery PEC. The research in this project was conducted independently of ECPAT UK's "Stable Futures" campaign.

The research team would like to thank all young people who participated in this project and their generosity in sharing their thoughts and ideas. They would also like to thank the organisations in the East Midlands and in Scotland who support young people for their invaluable assistance in facilitating the participatory workshops. They would also like to thank members of our Expert Reference Group for their support and assistance with this project.

This project was funded through an open call for proposals to examine support and recovery of survivors of modern slavery in the UK and is one of five independent projects commissioned through this portfolio.



## Findings

1. There is limited inclusion of children's views in research, policy, service design or delivery. In addition, a focus on achieving *positive* outcomes for children and young people who have experienced or are at risk of trafficking and modern slavery is currently absent from debates in the UK. The findings of this participatory research study address these gaps with the views of 31 young people detailing outcomes that are important for them and how barriers to achieving these are structural, systemic, and discriminatory.
2. For the first time, young people have identified 25 outcomes as important and meaningful to them as set out according to the four General Principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child – non-discrimination (Article 2), the best interests of the child (Article 3), the right to life, survival and development (Article 6) and the right to participation (Article 12). Young people highlighted being safe and feeling safe, stability and peace, having trust in professionals and systems, being believed, and listened to, freedom, equality, access to quality legal advice and interpreters as important rights-based outcomes.
3. Young people have identified what they would need to see for positive and meaningful change to happen in their lives, through a **Positive Outcomes Framework** which is anchored in their own words, ideas and priorities. Young people described outcomes as interconnected, difficult to disaggregate, rarely linear and interlinked with the wider contexts and structures of their lives. The outcomes identified were all seen as important for achieving a positive long-term future, with individual outcomes not confined within particular timeframes.



## Background

The voices of children and young people who have experienced human trafficking, modern slavery<sup>1</sup> or exploitation are missing from debates in the UK, with their opinions rarely taken into account in the development of law, policy and services.<sup>2</sup> This includes a lack of focus on 'outcomes', made more complex by the variable meaning of the term in practice and in literature. The aim of this study was to understand what positive outcomes and pathways towards these positive outcomes might look like from the perspectives of young people subjected to human trafficking, modern slavery and exploitation.

This study followed the What Works for Children's Social Care definition of 'outcomes' as the consequence of an action, where an action is a particular service or way of working,<sup>3</sup> but with a focus on rights-based, child-defined outcomes, encompassing children and young people's views of their own progress, lived experience and the main goals they wish to achieve. This definition is set out with an understanding that achievement of outcomes is dependent on the wider structures and contexts in which young people live their lives.

## Methodology

The study followed a participatory approach and brought together three methods allowing for triangulation of data: a scoping review of UK and international academic evidence; 15 submissions from eight countries to a global call for practice evidence through ECPAT UK's international network; and 20 participatory research workshops across three locations in the UK with 31 young people of a range of nationalities between 15 and 25 years old who have experienced trafficking or modern slavery and who had arrived in the UK.

The participatory workshops were designed to be child-centred and trauma-informed using a toolkit approach, with a range of arts, talking, storytelling, and multimedia-based activities to explore and represent the outcome themes of participation, inclusion, protection, empowerment and recovery. These were identified by the research team from the outset of the research as key thematic priorities for ensuring sustainable futures for young people with experiences of trafficking, that also reflect the relevant principles and provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.<sup>4</sup>

This study focused on children and young people who migrated to the UK and did not include young people from UK backgrounds, who make up a significant proportion of referrals to the UK National Referral Mechanism.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, working with young people who have a range of experiences and heterogeneous profiles means that this study does not lay claim to generalisable findings for all young people in the UK who have been affected by modern slavery. In addition, as with much of the available literature, most knowledge generated was based on access to participants who are in receipt and in touch with available services.

1. In this report the term human trafficking and modern slavery is used interchangeably. In England and Wales, modern slavery encompasses human trafficking, forced or compulsory labour, servitude and slavery.

2. Bovarnick, S. (2010) How do you define a 'trafficked child'? A discursive analysis of practitioners' perceptions around child trafficking, *Youth & Policy*, 104:80-96; Gearon, A. (2019) Child trafficking: Young people's experiences of front-line services in England, *British Journal of Criminology*, 59(2):481-500.

3. What Works Children's Social Care. (2020) Outcomes Framework. Making sure we focus on the issues that really matter; La Valle, I., et al. (2019) How do we know if children's social care services make a difference? Development of an outcomes framework.

4. UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), Adopted by General Assembly resolution 44/25 on 20 November 1989

5. The National Referral Mechanism (NRM) is the UK's identification and support system for potential victims of modern slavery and human trafficking.

## Findings

### 1. Limited inclusion of children's views in research and in policy and service design or delivery and limited focus on **positive** outcomes for children and young people who have experienced or are at risk of trafficking and modern slavery.

According to literature reviewed and the evidence submitted to the global call children's views are rarely requested and included in literature about them, even those pertaining to children's rights. None of the reports submitted as evidence included the participation of children and young people in the development of domestic policies and procedures by government agencies.

The predominant focus on experiences of negative outcomes in the literature is simultaneously important and problematic. Whilst it is important for highlighting the need for and areas for change, it also denies spaces of possibility for young people who have experienced or are at risk of trafficking and modern slavery. This focus on negative outcomes lies in contrast to how young people within this study imagined and envisaged their futures. Young people discussed the search for safety and protection, drawing on their strengths and capabilities, as well as their endurance of complex and often protracted social care, immigration, and criminal justice processes in the UK.

There is no consistent use of the term 'outcomes' in the broader modern slavery and human trafficking research landscape, with its use mainly linking to health outcomes following exploitation. There is some discussion of educational,<sup>6</sup> accommodation or immigration<sup>7</sup> outcomes within the literature as well as outcomes which are more difficult to measure and track such as safety, autonomy, wellbeing, resilience, self-respect, stigma and shame. There are varying outcome measures, quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis methods used in research on trafficking and health.<sup>8</sup> There are also a range of standardised measures available<sup>9</sup> but no one specific tool that has been validated for use with young people<sup>10</sup> affected by trafficking or that considers a broader range of trafficking experiences, much beyond sexual exploitation. Few trafficking studies incorporate holistic views of wellbeing and standardised measures used with this population have often not been tested with survivors of trafficking themselves.<sup>11</sup> There is a much greater focus on negative outcomes or negative health impacts than outcomes that focus on protective factors, rights, capabilities or resilience, with some notable exceptions.<sup>12</sup>

6. Boothby, N., Wessells, M., Williamson, J., Huebner, G., Canter, K., Rolland, E.G., Kutlesic, V., Bader, F., Diaw, L., Levine, M., Malley, A., Michels, K., Pateli, S., Rasa, T., Ssewamala, F. & Walker, V. (2012) What are the most effective early response strategies and interventions to assess and address the immediate needs of children outside of family care? *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 36:711-721; Heyeres, M., Perera N., Udah, H., Attakey, A., Whiteside, M. and Tsey, K. (2021) Interventions targeting the wellbeing of migrant youths: A systematic review of the literature, *SAGE Open*, 1-14

7. Dell, *et al.* (2019)

8. Cannon, A.C., Arcara, J., Graham, L.M. & Macy, R.J. (2016) Trafficking and health: A systematic review of research methods, *Trauma, Violence & Abuse*, 1-17.

9. Graham, L.M., Macy, R.J., Eckhardt, A., Rizo, C.F. & Jordan, B.L. (2019) Measures for evaluating sex trafficking aftercare and support services: A systematic review and resource compilation, *Aggression and Violence Behavior*, 47:117-136.

10. An Assessment of Survivor Outcomes (ASO) tool has been validated for use with adults by the International Justice Mission (IJM).

11. Graham *et al.* (2019).

12. Knight, L., Xin, Y. & Mengo, C. (2021) A scoping review of resilience in survivors of human trafficking, *Trauma, Violence & Abuse*, 1-15; Heyeres, *et al.* (2021).

2. For the first time, young people have identified a number of outcomes as important and meaningful to them, set out according to the four General Principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Young people identified structural, systemic and discriminatory barriers to achieving positive outcomes, emphasising the negative impact of immigration procedures.

Discussions around positive outcomes alongside barriers to achieving them were structured around the themes of participation, inclusion, protection, empowerment and recovery.

Young people highlighted the following as important positive outcomes:

### Non-discrimination (Article 2)

- **Having access to well-trained and, where possible child-specific interpreters**, was outlined by a number of young people as being vital in their lives.
- **Equality** was highlighted as an important outcome to young people, in relation to opportunities, outcomes and treatment that is fair and does not violate their rights such as the same quality of care or educational opportunities as other children in the UK.
- Young people also highlighted the importance of **freedom** as an outcome, **linked to equality of opportunity**, and, in the words of young people, the opportunity to *“pursue dreams, build futures, and “be part of the next generation.”*

### Best interests of the child (Article 3)

- Young people outlined how good **quality legal advice in the fields of immigration, asylum, public and criminal law** related directly to not being left without papers or documentation and family reunification to begin to **build a sustainable life**. Quality legal advice was a defining factor in attaining outcomes and providing a foundation for their lives, hopes, aspirations and contributions in the UK
- Young people with independent guardians or other forms of advocates **felt listened to and heard**, facilitating better child protection and spoke about why it was important for them to have advocates who can provide links between services.

*“The guardian [Independent Guardian] I think is really important for young people. ... they have like special experience with young people. Even the way they talk to the young people or the way - that’s really, really important and really special. They listen to the young people and they give you advice and they help you if you have any problem or if you need any help, they are able to help you at any time. For example, now I’m not under guardianship care anymore but I think now if I have a big problem, I’ll contact with my guardianship firstly and my social worker. Yeah, so it’s very important.”*  
(young person, location 3, session 2, May 2022)

The need for having access to practitioners who were specialist, trauma-informed and well-trained to understand how young people are affected by trafficking was frequently highlighted.

- Young people outlined **how they wanted to contribute to society, be asked what they think and feel, be understood, trusted, listened to and have what they say matter.**

*“Yes, so it’s comfortable for me to say, it’s, say my, say out loud my experience. And you are listening to me and that made me feel ... It’s like I feel nice because when I say something, someone listen. Not like I talk to the wall.”*

*(young person, location 2, session 5, May 2022)*

- Young people had a **broad conception of what protection** means for them which included aspects relating to safety and faith, belief, trust, confidence, the rule of law, knowing their rights and entitlements, having a secure home, accessing education and friendships

## Right to life, survival and development (Article 6)

- **Safety, being safe and feeling safe**, was seen as important outcomes and foundational for the **realisation of other outcomes**.
  - **Physical safety** was highlighted, especially in relation to safe and age-appropriate accommodation.
  - **Psychological safety** was reported as equally important and young people identified the police and interpreters (in immigration and care procedures) as professionals who could play a meaningful role in establishing a sense of psychological security.
- Young people saw **having trust in professionals and systems** as a key factor in achieving physical and relational safety
- **Stability and peace**. Young people conceptualised peace as recovery, including in the short term, psychological recovery and in the longer term, the recovery of ordinary life, identifying a clear relationship between protection and inclusion outcomes.

*“Peace is where you can see your future – when you can think about tomorrow.”*

*(young person, session 3, location 1, May 2022)*

- Young people stated that the factors that promote healthy development relate to **trusting relationships with sensitive and caring adults, feeling safe, valued and loved in nurturing environments, and a sense of belonging and community.**
- Young people spoke **about the importance of being believed** and how professionals should work with them.

## Right to participation (Article 12)

- A 'survivor turn' has occurred across other topics and is now being welcomed within human trafficking and modern slavery debates. There are cognate topics such as Violence Against Women (VAW) that hold insights relevant to trafficking, including their approach of working 'with' rather than 'on' or 'for' survivors as an understood aspect of interventions.
- Pathways to positive outcomes are contingent on ensuring work with children and young people is participatory, child-centred, and has a rights and entitlements approach that is underpinned by relational approaches built on trust. The quality and timing of support were found to be key factors influencing these pathways.
- In this study, young people responded well to having their thoughts, views, needs, hopes and aspirations included. Young people outlined how they wanted to contribute to society, be asked what they think and feel, be understood, trusted, listened to and have what they say matter.

## Barriers to achieving positive outcomes

Young people, the UK literature review<sup>13</sup> and submissions to the global call for evidence **identified structural, systemic and discriminatory barriers to achieving positive outcomes, with immigration, asylum, criminal justice system and support in care pointed out as most important.** They considered the ways in which structural inequality can shape professional practices and attitudes across agencies.

Restrictive asylum and immigration laws and policies were reported as **amplifying trauma, limiting education and employment opportunities, and creating conditions of powerlessness** that resonate with the trafficking and exploitation experiences of victims.

Young people identified other barriers to achieving positive outcomes:

- Young people spoke about the **default of disbelief in professional responses**, which makes them feel frightened and unsafe. Distrust and victim-blaming that young people told us about can have **long-term impacts**, as children face increasingly hostile age assessments which can have a direct effect on their futures and long-term outcomes
- **Young people emphasised the negative impact of immigration procedures.** They often highlighted the distressing nature of asylum decision making and some described waiting in immigration 'limbo' as being worse than experiences of exploitation. They say these procedures undermine the recognition and realisation of rights, and place young people at risk of further exploitation
- Some highlighted the bordered nature of their encounters with professionals, and at times **racist and discriminatory attitudes** from social workers, the police and asylum case workers.

---

13. Gearon, (2019).



- Various submissions to the global call and young people **highlighted transitions to adulthood** as presenting significant barriers to achieving good outcomes as young people find themselves without adequate support or entitlements having left care
- Young people discussed that when they came into contact with professionals and practitioners they had to repeat details to each service, **perpetually re-opening traumatic experiences and setting them back from recovery**.
- **Young people discussed how they did or did not feel listened to** and whether they thought what they said mattered to practitioners and others around them. Their 'voice' was described as being contingent on feeling safe and comfortable.

### 3. Young people have identified what they would need to see for positive and meaningful change to happen in their lives, through a Positive Outcomes Framework anchored in their own words, ideas and priorities.

This Positive Outcomes Framework is set out in the full research report and is structured around the four inter-connected principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child; non-discrimination (Article 2), the best interests of the child (Article 3), the right to life, survival and development (Article 6) and the right to participation (Article 12).

The **Positive Outcomes Framework** is intended as a holistic tool for use at individual practice and policy levels with populations of young people who have arrived in the UK and who have experienced modern slavery or human trafficking. To operationalise this framework and allow the development of qualitative and quantitative measurements for each indicator a pilot study is recommended to test its effectiveness.

The research project originally set out to look at what short-, medium- and long-term positive outcomes might look like. In workshops, young people were encouraged to think about what needs and outcomes were important for professionals and services to focus on upon during arrival and identification, in the first few months after identification, and in the longer term. Young people discussed how outcomes across these different periods were interrelated and difficult to disaggregate in their lives. They also expressed the challenge of separating different stages of outcomes because, from their perspective, all were related and important for achieving a positive long-term future. Instead, young people discussed how outcomes changed over time alongside their needs and in response to their experiences of the systems, people and services they encounter. Given the challenges of categorising outcomes into short-, medium- and long-term framings, these have not been artificially incorporated into the Positive Outcomes Framework.

Young people's views and experiences were interlinked with the wider contexts and structures of their lives. During this research project young people expressed high levels of anxiety regarding a range of Government policies to prevent migrations potentially affecting them, young people like them or people they know.

## Recommendations

To address the issues raised by the evidence collected in this study through we make several recommendations to help improve positive outcomes for children:

### For the UK Government and devolved administrations

- The **UK Government and devolved administrations** must ensure that all decisions about children in their individual cases and in the development of law and policy are made with their best interests as the primary consideration.
- The **UK Government and devolved administrations** must ensure mechanisms are in place for the meaningful participation of child victims in policies and interventions that affect them. These include providing child-friendly information, undertaking Child Rights Impact Assessments on emerging policies, building in a monitoring and impact evaluation process following the implementation of those policies and developing meaningful consultation with young people.
- The **UK Government and devolved administrations** must ensure that child victims of trafficking are always treated as children first and afforded their rights to the protection and care they need.
- The **UK Government and devolved administrations** must ensure children identified as potential victims of slavery and trafficking are promptly assigned an independent legal guardian.
- The **UK Government and devolved administrations** must commit to supporting positive outcomes for child victims in care, education, immigration as well as measuring the impact towards positive outcomes of the National Referral Mechanism.
- The **UK Government and devolved administrations** should consider operationalising the **Positive Outcomes Framework in a pilot study to measure the effectiveness of current policies in achieving positive outcomes for identified child victims.**

### For the Home Office

- The **Home Office** must ensure the immigration and asylum system does not re-traumatise children.
- The **Home Office** must ensure that current barriers to the recovery and achievement of positive outcomes for child victims are removed. Procedures must not place children at risk of further exploitation nor undermine their rights with an emphasis on their transition into adulthood.

## The Ministry of Justice

- The **Ministry of Justice** must ensure all child victims can access a solicitor who has the expertise to properly represent them in the complex areas of immigration, criminal justice, child welfare and protection law.

## Local authorities

- **Local authority children's services** with the full support of the **Department for Education and equivalents in the devolved administrations** must provide quality care for migrant child victims to ensure they are afforded specialist support and the same opportunities as other young people.
- **Local authority children's services** must enable psychological and physical recovery for child victims, particularly in the provision of safe accommodation and access to mental health services.
- **Statutory chief officers and safeguarding partners in each local authority area must ensure they develop relationship-based practice that builds trust** with children as a fundamental measure to their ability to have their voices heard and for them to feel safe.

## Practitioners

- **All professionals working with children and young people who have been identified as trafficked must ensure a positive non-discriminatory practice and use non-discriminatory and non-stigmatising language when working with them.**

## Areas for further research

- Explore routes to operationalising the Positive Outcomes Framework developed in this study and to build necessary monitoring and evaluation structures into interventions for this population.
- Develop qualitative and/or quantitative measurements for each indicator when the Positive Outcomes Framework is deployed to gauge the impact of individual instances or particular policies, with the latter potentially focussed on effects of anti-trafficking practice on trafficking 'victims'.
- Ensure these measurements are culturally and contextually relevant for young people who have overcome trafficking, best conceived through longitudinal designs, a future consideration for funders.

# MODERN SLAVERY & HUMAN RIGHTS

POLICY &  
EVIDENCE  
CENTRE

Led by the Bingham Centre

The Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre (Modern Slavery PEC) was created by the investment of public funding to enhance understanding of modern slavery and transform the effectiveness of law and policies designed to address it. The Centre funds and co-creates high quality research with a focus on policy impact, and brings together academics, policymakers, businesses, civil society, survivors and the public on a scale not seen before in the UK to collaborate on solving this global challenge.

The Centre is a consortium of six academic organisations led by the Bingham Centre for the Rule of Law and is funded by the Art and Humanities Research Council on behalf of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI).

Our partners:



University of  
**Nottingham**  
Rights Lab

Bonavero  
Institute  
of Human  
Rights



UNIVERSITY OF HULL | WILBERFORCE  
INSTITUTE

**The  
Alan Turing  
Institute**



The Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre is funded and actively supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), part of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), from the Strategic Priorities Fund.

Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre  
c/o British Institute of International and Comparative Law  
Charles Clore House, 17 Russell Square, London, WC1B 5JP

A company limited by guarantee  
Registered in England No. 615025  
Registered Charity No. 209425

[office@modernslaverypec.org](mailto:office@modernslaverypec.org)

[www.modernslaverypec.org](http://www.modernslaverypec.org)