

## **AFRUCA – Africans Unite Against Child Abuse**

Promoting the Rights and Welfare of African Children

# **WHAT IS CHILD TRAFFICKING?**

Safeguarding African Children in the UK Series 4

- 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition



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# 1 About AFRUCA

**AFRUCA - Africans Unite Against Child Abuse** was established in May 2001 as a platform for promoting the rights and welfare of African Children in the UK. AFRUCA has developed a national profile as an organisation rooted in the African community bringing specialist knowledge and expertise to the work of practitioners and policy makers to safeguard African children.

AFRUCA works in five key areas to help promote the rights and welfare of African children in the UK:

**Awareness Raising and Sensitisation:** With African communities and among young Africans about children's rights as enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international conventions and UK legislation promoting the rights and welfare of children.

**Information, Education and Advisory Services:** To raise the profile of African children in the UK, increase awareness of their needs, improve policies and practices, and develop the leadership potential of young Africans. Activities include research and publishing reports; media work; conferences, seminars, workshops, and training programmes for parents, policy makers, service providers, community leaders, and young people; community meetings; advice and consultancy services.

**Advocacy and Policy Development:** Working closely with policy makers to shape the development of policy and regulatory action to promote the welfare of children.

**Community and International Development:** In partnership with others, putting in place programmes and projects that help relieve some of the suffering and hardship that African children experience.

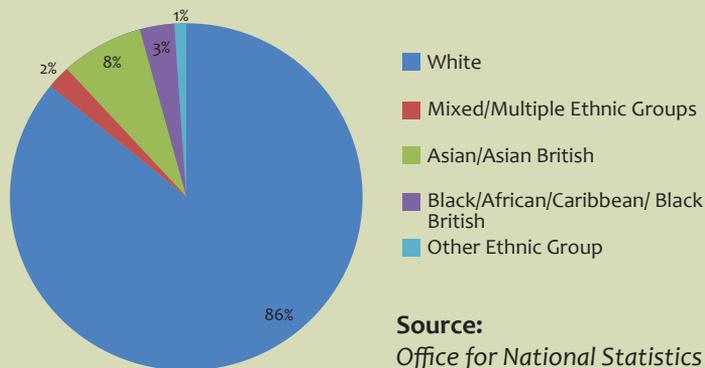
**Support for Children, Young People and Families:** Working to support children, young people and African families in crisis or at the point of breakdown through effective early intervention services.

## 2 Africans in the UK

The UK, through its historical links with a number of English speaking African countries, and also due to its reputation as the most multi-cultural country in Europe, has become home to many African people.

The 2011 UK census indicated that there are over 1.8 million Africans in the UK, an increase of 1.1 million from the 2001 census making up 3.3% of the overall UK population.

### Ethnic groups, London and Wales 2011



Africans are generally well integrated into British society and are economically and academically driven, making vast contributions within the health and social care system and in business. Children from African backgrounds are achieving particularly well within the British education system, and continue to strive.

### Social Issues affecting Africans in the UK

Africans like many other immigrant groups in the UK tend to migrate with their values, beliefs and work ethos. While we acknowledge some cultural practices, beliefs and values are beneficial, others are particularly harmful to certain sections of the community such as to children and women. Increasingly, Local Authorities across the country are reporting a rise in cases of African families coming to the attention of Children's Services mainly due to differences in approaches to child rearing, physical disciplining and religious or cultural practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and witchcraft branding.

These are practices seen as normal by many Africans but could be considered as posing significant harm according to UK laws. Moreover, many African parents, faith and community leaders themselves are unaware of the UK laws and practices that safeguard children. As a result, many African children are being removed from their families and placed into the care system, leading to more African families being broken up, with significant psychological impact.

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There are high levels of unemployment as new arrivals face difficulties in accessing jobs that match their qualifications or experience. African communities, particularly new immigrants also find themselves without decent housing and a high proportion of Africans live on the poorest and most neglected estates in the UK's largest cities. Finally, many Africans have difficulty accessing social and health care, some due to their immigration status, but also, sometimes, because they are unaware of the local support services available to them.

Children and young people come in unaccompanied, or as unaccompanied asylum seeking young people or with others who are not their parents or immediate family members into the UK annually. Many of these children and young people have been transported into the country to be exploited and abused in different ways. Without appropriate intervention, most of them would experience untold suffering and hardship at the hands of their exploiters over a long period of time. In a couple of known cases in London, child victims of trafficking ended up being killed by those exploiting them. This publication examines the phenomenon of child trafficking in the UK and the role that members of the African community can play to protect victims.

AFRUCA has produced the **“Safeguarding African Children in the UK”** series of publications to highlight different safeguarding issues and to assist members of the African community in the UK to know more about different forms of child abuse and how to identify the signs so children can be safe and be better protected. The **“What is Child Trafficking?”** booklet is the second in the series.



### 3 What is Child Trafficking?

Child Trafficking is a growing problem across the UK and in Africa. There are many complex definitions but for simplicity's sake, we at AFRUCA define it as follows:

*“The trafficking of children shall simply mean the movement of children for the purpose of exploitation and abuse.”*

Core to the definition of Child Trafficking are two key elements commonly referred to as:

- (a) The act
- (b) The purpose

The **‘act’** simply refers to the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child or children for the **‘purpose’** of exploitation.

In the UK, the phenomenon of child trafficking was first noticed in 1995 by social workers in West Sussex Social Services. Young girls travelling unaccompanied on flights from West Africa landing at Gatwick Airport would come to claim asylum. Put in the care of Social Services, days or weeks later, they would disappear from care. Before long, a pattern began to emerge: children, mainly Nigerian girls, were being trafficked to Europe via the UK to become sex workers. A lot of these girls spoken to by Social Services talked about owing their exploiters huge sums of money which they had to pay back otherwise terrible things would happen to them or their families back home. Since then, many more cases have come to the fore.

Research suggests that children are trafficked for different kinds of exploitation, the most common types being sexual exploitation, domestic servitude, child labour, benefit fraud, organ harvesting and false or illegal adoption. There is evidence that African children are being transported to the UK to be used as slaves or exploited in many different ways. At AFRUCA, we have seen cases where a child was exploited in more ways than one. For instance, children trafficked into the UK for domestic servitude can also be presented to claim benefits. Unfortunately, such benefits received are never used for the upkeep of these children but to enrich the traffickers.

The figures from the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) (the UK system for looking after victims) released by the National Crime Agency (NCA) in January 2015 showed that for the year 2014, over 566 Africans were referred by charities and government agencies as victims of human trafficking. The five top African countries include: Nigeria (244 victims), Eritrea (53 victims), Ghana (31 victims), Ethiopia (28 victims) and Uganda (25 victims). NCA further reported that out of the 2,340 referrals of potential victims of trafficking (PVOT) in the UK in 2014, at

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least 671 children fit the child trafficking exploitation profile. There were also 151 cases of African children recorded in the data all under 17 years old at the time of first claimed exploitation. The biggest source country in Africa is Nigeria as a total of 54 minor victims of trafficking were referred into the NRM.

The UK government has taken key strategic steps to tackle the growing problem of trafficking by putting in place new laws and signing up to international protocols. For example, the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime (also known as the Palermo Protocol) was signed by the United Kingdom in 2001 and ratified in 2006. Furthermore, the Modern Slavery Act 2015 was introduced to better protect victims and ensure stringent punishment for human traffickers - those who transport people so they can exploit them. They now face a life prison sentence if found guilty.

## Human Trafficking and Human Smuggling

The terms ‘trafficking’ and ‘smuggling’ are often used interchangeably, but in fact they mean different things.

**Human smuggling** is the process whereby people pay to be illegally transported into a country. Upon arrival, the smuggled ‘customer’ is free to do as they please. An example is when parents pay a smuggler to help them bring their child into the country. Once the child is delivered to the parents and money has exchanged hands, the relationship with the smuggler ends.

**Human trafficking**, on the other hand, is when the person who is taken into the country becomes a victim – because they have been forced to come into the country or deceived by false promises of a job, education or better living conditions. Once in the country, the trafficked victim is not free, but at the mercy of the trafficker, who denies them basic rights and exploits them in all kinds of ways.

This is not to say that the act of human smuggling is right, safe or legal. UK laws forbid the transportation of people into the country illegally. Not only that, there have been instances where parents have paid for their children to be smuggled into the country only for the children to end up being exploited and abused by the smuggler. In some instances, the children are never delivered to the parents but end up stolen and used for other purposes. The parents never see their children again.

## 4 Is Child Trafficking Modern Day Slavery?

The trafficking of children from different African countries, regions and outside Africa to other continents like Europe is indeed a growing problem. The scale of the problem is as massive as it is confounding. Experts in Africa have suggested that at least 1 million African children are victims of trafficking and exploitation within Africa itself.

According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) - the United Nations agency charged with addressing labour standards, employment and social protection issues around the world - there are 12.3 million people in forced labour, bonded labour, forced child labour and sexual servitude at any given time; other estimates range from 4 million to 27 million. 56% of all forced labour victims are women and girls.

Human Trafficking means big money, according to UN estimates. Worldwide human trafficking is worth about \$32 billion annually. This means that human trafficking is the third most profitable biggest illicit trade, after drugs and arms trafficking.

Despite the above, human trafficking is still a hidden trade due to the clandestine and criminal nature of the activities. This is why it is always difficult to give accurate figures of the number of victims. However, because of the scale and extent, experts have suggested that present day trafficking of Africans to the West is fast approaching the same level as the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. During this period, millions of Africans perished en-route to the “New World” or ended up as slaves in the new Americas, the Caribbean and some parts of South America.



## 5 What are the Causes of Child Trafficking?

Child trafficking involves trading in children as commodities and exploiting them often for economic benefits. As a business, it also operates according to the law of supply and demand. At one end of the scale, there is a huge demand for children, both boys and girls, to meet the requirements of the sex industry. In addition, children are needed to meet the demands in the adoption market, for cheap labour, for different forms of crime and other illicit activities that adults cannot perform.

### Push Factors

These are social, economic and political reasons that facilitate the trafficking of children from one country to another. In essence, they make children vulnerable and highly susceptible to traffickers. These factors include: poverty, war, prosecution, political and economic instability, corruption, bad family situations, HIV/AIDS pandemic, harmful cultural practices i.e. the culture of using children as *house-helpers* and the search for a better life due to a general lack of opportunities in countries of origin.

Statistics show that 50% of Africans are children below the age of 18 years old. A lot of these children are orphans or street children. They live in abject poverty, in conflict situations or uncared for by their communities - whatever the reason. These are the children prone to being trafficked. The HIV/AIDS pandemic has created a generation of African children with no one to look after them. A lot of them resort to living life on the streets. Given these realities, it is not surprising that compared to their lives of abject poverty, these children become highly vulnerable to the temptation of a better life in Europe.

Child trafficking is also fuelled by certain cultural practices among Africans. Although caused by poverty, it is neither uncommon nor unusual for children to be engaged in different forms of hard and hazardous labour. On the streets of many African cities, children are exploited as hawkers, beggars and for other dangerous activities. In most African homes, from a very early age, girls are expected to be able to perform certain duties including cooking, cleaning and baby sitting, as part of their socialisation process. In the extended African family system, parents have traditionally sent their children to live and work in other households - sometimes entrusting them to better-off relatives in the cities. Increasingly, many people are abusing these traditional practices by exploiting the vulnerability of these children. The Women Consortium of Nigeria claims that 80% of children in forced labour in Nigeria are victims of trafficking.

In addition to the above, it is important to highlight the role that corruption has played in fuelling the trade in African children. This means that trafficking syndicates are able to procure documentation to transport victims out of their countries without being checked by local border controls. Sometimes, inept

embassy and immigration officials in the UK are seen as complicit in fuelling the trade in children due to their inability to safeguard victims who present at the consular office or the port of entry.

Although some children are trafficked after being kidnapped or abducted from their homes, the reality is that most child victims are trafficked by someone they know, either from their own community, or even within their own family. A child's parent or guardian may have been deceived by the promises of a better future for their child to come and live in the UK. But in reality, only a life of slavery and exploitation awaits them.

## Pull Factors

Pull factors are those favourable social and economic factors that lure unsuspecting vulnerable children into destinations like the United Kingdom, European countries and other developed countries in the world. One of such factors is the demand for Black girls in the sex industry which is often met by the trafficking of young African girls into Europe for prostitution.

Similarly, the high cost of childcare in Europe often leads couples to seek a cheaper alternative to the regulated childcare services available. Therefore, some resort to trafficking children and young people from Africa for the sole purpose of exploiting them through unpaid labour or using them as domestic servants in their homes. For instance, at AFRUCA, 80% of young people referred to our service were trafficked for domestic servitude. With the promise of receiving better education in Europe, African children from disadvantaged backgrounds are lured by traffickers to travel to the UK to further their education. In some cases, parents or carers of such children may have been complicit in the trafficking and at other times, they may have been deceived by the traffickers.



## 6 Why Are Children Trafficked into the UK?

Children are trafficked from Africa to the UK and other parts of Europe for a variety of reasons. In the UK, some of the children and young people we have worked with at AFRUCA were trafficked for the following purposes:

### Domestic Slavery

Many children and young people deceived into coming to the UK for a better life have ended up as domestic slaves in the country. By far, the highest number of children we have come across at AFRUCA are in this category. Hidden away in people's homes, they spend their lives caring for families, cooking, cleaning, looking after children and performing other tasks inside the home. They work long hours and most of the time, are deprived of an education. When they do go to school, this is usually for a very limited period and they do not get the time to study at home. They are deprived of access to health care - most of them only go to hospital as a result of serious illness or injury. As children, they are deprived of the love, affection and attention of a loving adult. In addition, they suffer untold physical and psychological abuse. They are hardly paid for their work. A lot of the children in this situation are also used to claim State benefit, although the money is not used to look after them. In many cases, girls are also sexually abused.

For most of these children, reaching the age of 18 brings its own problems. As young adults, they are deemed too old to be controlled unlike when they were much younger. They are also now past the age when the exploiter can claim State benefits for them. After many years of being exploited, they end up on the streets, homeless, with no identity, no job prospects, no skills and no form of support.

### Case Study One

**"Anita"** was taken by a relative from her village in Republic of Benin to live in Nigeria. She ended up being sold as a domestic servant to a Nigerian family in Lagos. She worked with them for two years looking after their home and taking care of their 2 children. Later, the family decided to migrate to London. They brought "Anita" with them and she continued her role as a domestic servant. She was not allowed to leave the house and she never went to school. She was always beaten and not given enough food to eat. After hearing her cry many times, neighbours reported her case to Social Services who came to rescue her and took her into care.

## Sexual Exploitation

Other children will be trafficked expressly for the purpose of sexual exploitation, and may end up working as prostitutes. So many young African girls have been tricked into coming to Europe to work in the sex industry. Many of these girls have also been made to undergo oath rituals before being trafficked into Europe. See section on **“Oath Rituals as a Means of Coercion”** (For more on this, read Chapter 7). In some instances, African girls are bought and sold by family members and traffickers to brothel owners in Europe. In countries like Italy, Spain and Holland, it is common to see young African girls prostituting on the streets. These girls would have to work for many years before they are able to pay back what the traffickers claim is money owed. If they refuse, they are threatened and beaten up or their families back home are beaten up until they fully submit. Some end up being murdered.

### Case Study Two

**“Angela”** is an AIDS orphan who lived in Kenya as a street child. As a way of sustaining herself, she sold sex to tourists in Mombassa. She was approached by one of her punters who promised to help her by bringing her to the UK so she could go to school and have a new, decent life. He got her a passport and a visa and they both travelled on the plane to London. On arrival, they were met at the airport by two men who took her away. She never saw her “friend” again. “Angela” was locked up in a house where men would come to have sex with her. One day, her exploiter went out and forgot to lock the door from behind. “Angela” was able to escape. She was taken by a sympathetic passer-by to a Police station where she was referred to Children’s Services.

## Benefit Fraud

Children are also used to claim benefits from the State. These benefits very often do not go towards meeting the needs of the children in whose name they are claimed, as they continue to live in poverty and hardship. Most child domestic servants fall in this category. In addition, children living with others in undisclosed private fostering arrangements are also used to claim benefits and are equally prone to exploitation, abuse and harm. The story of Victoria Climbié, the 8-year-old Ivorian girl, is well known in the UK and is a case in point. Brought into the UK for benefits purposes, she suffered untold cruelty and abuse at the hands of her exploiter. She died as a result of her abuse.

In many cases of trafficking for benefit fraud we have come across, once the trafficker can no longer claim money on behalf of the child they are thrown out on the streets. The young person would be forced to find a way of sustaining themselves. This also makes them vulnerable to further abuse and exploitation.

### Case Study Three

**“Kunle”** and his brother aged 10 and 9 years old were brought into the country by relatives after the death of their father in Nigeria, with promises that they will go to school in London. Once they arrived in the UK, their aunty started claiming benefits for them while forcing the two boys to work in her Nigerian restaurant located in South London. Kunle’s younger brother had a learning disability which made the two boys more vulnerable. Kunle felt he had to please his aunt in order for them not to end up on the streets of London where they knew no one. They were woken up at 5am every day and went to bed at midnight. Their tasks included going to the market every other day to buy the foodstuff used in the restaurant and carrying the foodstuff home on foot since they were never given transport money. “Kunle” and his brother would walk long distances to and from the marketplace. If they took too long to return, they would be severely punished for being late. On return from the market, they would help cook the food, serve customers, wash dishes and clean up the restaurant. Even though they were allowed to go to school, this was not regular. They felt heavily burdened as they were still expected to carry out all their daily chores regardless. The money that was received was never spent on their upkeep and their situation grew worse when Kunle turned 18. Eventually, they were both able to break free from their abusers. Now in their 20s, they are still trying to cope with the traumatic effects of their long term exploitation and abuse.

### Forced Labour

AFRUCA has come across many cases of children trafficked into the country to undertake different forms of unsuitable work for children. There are known cases of children working in African restaurants, food stores and shops without pay, and for long hours when they are supposed to be at school.

### Case Study Four

**“Segun”** was brought to London from Nigeria at the age of 13 by a man who promised to help him fulfil his dream of becoming a footballer. He said he knew how to help young boys join football clubs in the UK. “Segun” was living with a friend of the family as both his mother and father had died. His father had died 6 years earlier. He has no siblings and no primary carer. The person who brought him used false papers so “Segun” had no proof of ID other than his birth certificate. Once in the UK he was made to work at a carwash in South London during the day and at the weekends he worked as a toilet attendant in a nightclub. All the money he earned went to the man who had brought him to the country. After about a year, “Segun” eventually managed to escape from his abuser with the help of AFRUCA.

## Illegal Adoption (Miracle Babies)

Children from Africa as well as other parts of the world have been brought to the West after having been stolen or illegally adopted. In 2007, the wife of a Kenyan evangelist was jailed in Kenya for running an illegal adoption racket. In recent times, the UK has dealt with ‘Miracle Baby’ cases with some perpetrators receiving 12-month suspended sentences which are often reduced to 250-hour community service. However, child right advocates are calling for more stringent punishment and sentencing for couples found guilty of this type of child trafficking by the UK criminal courts. They are also calling for the introduction of a separate Child Exploitation Offence Act to deal with the exploitation of children illegally adopted and brought into the UK.

### Case Study Five

**“Mr and Mrs Smith”** have been trying to have a baby for years and all efforts in trying to conceive have proved unfruitful. They were advised by their family back in Nigeria to visit a fertility clinic in Nigeria. “Mrs Smith” travelled to Nigeria and on getting to the fertility clinic, was given herbs to drink. She was told not to take a pregnancy test or have ante-natal care or scans because the pregnancy was a miraculous conception. She was told at the fertility clinic to come back nine months after to deliver her baby. When “Mrs Smith” returned to the UK, she did as instructed. She neither registered for ante-natal care nor went for a scan all through the pregnancy. Her GP in London was not even aware that she was pregnant. “Mr and Mrs Smith” returned to the fertility clinic at the agreed month and Mrs Smith was given herbs again but this time she lost all consciousness. When she woke up, she was given a baby boy and told she had delivered when she was unconscious.

This is the story often told by couples who have been apprehended for false or illegal adoption in the UK commonly referred to as ‘Miracle Baby’ cases by practitioners. Such births are often staged and couples claim they were not complicit in the charade. However, it has been proven in UK courts several times that the birth certificates of such babies were fake and had been procured illegally in the country of birth by the so called ‘innocent couples’. Unfortunately, couples who have been found guilty in the UK have often received a reduced prison sentence rather than a full sentence. Child rights organisations and charities are campaigning for stringent prison sentencing for couples found guilty of such crimes as this is a form of child exploitation and trafficking.

## 7 Witchcraft, Oath Taking Rituals and Child Trafficking

### Oath Rituals as a Means of Coercion

Belief in witchcraft is common in Africa and entails a faith in unseen supernatural forces capable of bringing prosperity or harm to a person (See our publication “What is Witchcraft Abuse?”). ‘Juju’ priests occupy a high standing within traditional African societies due to their powers to engage in the supernatural realm. Traffickers are known to exploit these beliefs by using elements of juju and oath rituals to coerce and subjugate their victims. Before leaving for destination countries, many victims are made to take oaths of allegiance and secrecy to bind them to their traffickers, ensuring compliance and guaranteeing the repayment of the huge sums of money claimed to be owed for transporting the victims to Europe and for their upkeep. Many victims fearful of the repercussions of the oaths taken are compelled to endure their suffering in silence, without recourse to help or support. The fear of juju makes it extremely difficult for agencies to support victims and for the authorities to investigate, prosecute and bring suspected traffickers to justice.

### Case Study Six

“*Barbara*” was trafficked from Nigeria to the UK where she was forced by her trafficker to work as a prostitute. Before being trafficked, she was taken to the shrine of a ‘Juju’ priest. The priest performed an oath ritual stipulating that if she betrayed or disobeyed him or her trafficker, the gods would punish her with nightmares, madness and even death. She was cut with a razor on her torso, head, back and waist then native chalk was rubbed into the wounds before she was made to eat an uncooked chicken heart. Then, the priest put cuttings of her nails, pubic and armpit hair and personal items such as her underwear in a jar. After years of exploitation, “*Barbara*” eventually found a way to escape her trafficker with the help of a client. The Police investigated the case but “*Barbara*” frequently refused to cooperate. When asked about places and people’s names she would say she had forgotten. “*Barbara*” often became aggressive or tearful when further questioned by officers who had begun to doubt her honesty. When asked to identify the house she was kept in she refused. She told the officers that if she did the gods would punish her and she would die. It became apparent that “*Barbara’s*” behaviour was caused by fear of the oath ritual she had undertaken (Case study information courtesy Andrew Desmond).

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## Witchcraft and Child Trafficking

Belief in witchcraft has also been identified as a reason for the abuse of children by some parents and guardians. Witchcraft abuse refers to the phenomenon of branding children as witches and subjecting them to different forms of abuse as a punishment or in an attempt to exorcise evil spirits from them. The branding of children as witches is a commonplace response to problems such as poverty, deprivation, unemployment, lack of success, family breakdown, and even poor health. These misfortunes are blamed on children believed to be in possession of malevolent powers. They are then subjected to many forms of abuse as well as being thrown out of the home and isolated from the rest of the community.

The common traits used to identify children as witches are often trivial. They include: disabilities such as autism, epilepsy and Down's syndrome, rudeness and delinquency, left handedness, exceptional intelligence, and coming from a broken family. In Africa, children expelled from their homes become "street children" and are very vulnerable to abuse, exploitation and trafficking. You can read more about witchcraft abuse in our publication "[What is Witchcraft Abuse?](#)"

## 8 Where are the Children Coming From?

Almost every country in Africa has a child trafficked into the UK for exploitation. In our work at AFRUCA, we have come across children from different parts of the continent – from West Africa, East Africa, Central and Southern Africa. These include: Nigeria, Republic of Benin, Ghana, Uganda, Kenya, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Somalia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Congo, Sierra Leone, Eritrea, Gambia, Ethiopia and Ivory Coast. Recent research in the UK has, however, increasingly identified children from other African countries. These include Morocco, Togo, Guinea-Conakry, Burundi as well as Angola. However, most of the victims of trafficking we work with come from countries with colonial ties to the UK.

## 9 Challenges in Identifying Child Victims of Trafficking

Most children trafficked to the UK arrive as unaccompanied minors seeking asylum or as children accompanied by adults pretending to be their “auntie” or “uncle”. Children are often brought into the UK with false passports and forged documents. If they enter the country with their authentic documents, the trafficker will take these away and instil in them a fear of making contact with any anyone, especially government agencies like the Police or Children’s Services. With no documents as proof of identity, children are left vulnerable as the authorities more often than not treat them as illegal immigrants.

Many child victims of trafficking are not able to prove their identity due to the fact that travel documents used by traffickers in bringing children into destination countries like UK, Spain or Italy are often procured fraudulently. They may not have the correct name or date of birth of the child, could be other people’s passports or visas, and these travel documents are usually not given to their victims to keep. This poses a great challenge when victims escape their trafficking situations and are presented to Children’s Services or other government agencies. Lack of proper identification may lead to children being criminalised for activities linked to their trafficking ordeal and their credibility could also be in doubt when they are presented to authorities. From our work at AFRUCA, we have identified the following challenges child victims of trafficking may face when they are presented to authorities in the UK.

### Criminalisation

Lack of proper identification and the failure to recognise a young person as a victim of trafficking by State agencies like the Police or UKVI (UK Visas and Immigration) may result in young people being placed in prisons and detention centres. Victims who have been subjected to criminal exploitation are often identified as ‘suspects’ rather than being seen as actual victims of trafficking. Many of these victims are held until such a time when an age assessment can be carried out to determine their approximate age.

### Culture of Disbelief

The culture of disbelief in relation to African victims of trafficking persists amongst law enforcement agencies. Hence, young people’s stories are not believed and they are thus not seen as potential victims. When potential victims of trafficking are interviewed, the sessions are sometimes conducted in inappropriate environments. Furthermore, when children and young people are unable to articulate themselves properly, their stories are deemed as incoherent and the credibility of such stories become doubtful. The culture of disbelief leads to minimal investigations in reported cases. Also, when young people come forward

to report their abuse, they are often criticised for not reporting it earlier or immediately after they escaped. This has resulted in many traffickers and abusers getting away with this serious crime.

## Age Assessment and its Impact on Trafficked Children

For many unaccompanied children trafficked into the UK with false documentation or in cases where their travel documents have been taken off them by the trafficker, the authorities may often not accept the dates claimed to be their dates of birth. The situation can be further complicated if these unaccompanied minors are found to be in possession of travel documents that give different dates of birth from their real ages. Hence, in the absence of documentary evidence, such children are subjected to an age assessment for the purpose of getting an estimated date of birth that is acceptable by the State. However, conducting an age assessment does not necessarily mean the assessor will be able to confirm an accurate age, but rather an estimated age. We have seen situations where the results of such assessments conclude that a minor is older than their claimed age. Consequently, such minors are treated like adult victims of trafficking rather than child victims. These have huge implications for such children because they will be denied access to support and benefits which they would have been entitled to if they were assessed as children and not adults.

### Case Study Seven

Take the case of **'Belinda'** (a Nigerian) who was arrested in possession of false documentation. Belinda told the criminal solicitor appointed for her by the State that she was sixteen years old. However the Crown relied upon her visa application as evidence that she was 22 years old and was consequently put in an adult prison. While in prison, she met a 'Befriender' who she recounted her story to. This led the Befriender to contact AFRUCA because she felt Belinda could be a potential victim of trafficking. AFRUCA's assessment of Belinda in prison revealed that she has indeed been trafficked. She had a long battle with Children's Services before an age assessment was conducted. Following Belinda's age assessment, it was concluded that she could not have been 22 years old but her estimated date of birth would make her 20 years old. Belinda still disagrees with the result and has refused to accept the estimated age.

# 10 What are the Implications of Child Trafficking?

Child victims of trafficking suffer in many different ways. The emotional and psychological anguish experienced by victims lead to long-term mental health problems, post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other psychological damage. The lack of access to education means most victims are condemned to a lifetime of poverty since they are unable to access good quality jobs because of their reduced level of education. For most victims, the frequent physical punishment and abuse also result in very serious and long-term medical conditions. At AFRUCA, we have identified five main areas trafficking impacts on children namely: physical, emotional, mental, sexual, neglect and child development.

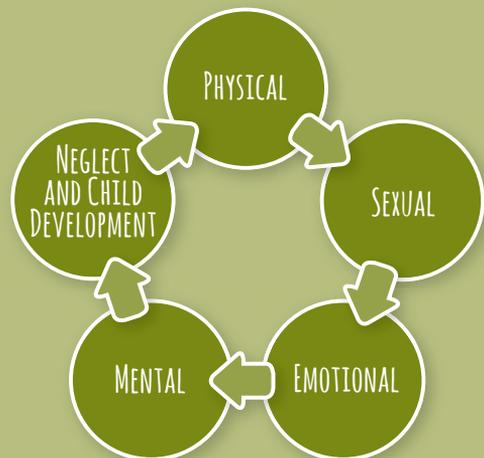
- (a) **Physical Impact:** This may include scars, injuries and damages to the body and health resulting from engaging in hazardous labour, beating with heavy tools, stamping on stomachs, kicking, hitting, punching, weight loss due to starving and fatigue.
- (b) **Sexual Impact:** Victims exploited sexually may contract STDs, including, HIV/AIDS, leading in some cases to illness and death.
- (c) **Emotional Impact:** The emotional impact of child trafficking is often long-lasting on victims especially because years in slavery, exploitation and abuse are ‘wasted years’ in the eyes of victims. Hence, while many victims may try to live normal lives after escaping their trafficking situation, the pain from their past may jeopardise their full recovery. They may have problems with trusting people or the authorities. Some may find themselves in harmful relationships or risky situations. There have been cases where victims become traffickers themselves, luring unsuspecting children and young people in their native countries into similar exploitative situations they faced as children (abused becomes the abuser).
- (d) **Neglect and Child Development:** Lack of documentation for victims results in children not accessing education, proper health care and social welfare. This leads to children developing low self esteem, low self confidence, poor social skills and stunted individual growth. This can often make victims prone to criminal activities as well.
- (e) **Mental Impact:** The development of mental health problems amongst victims and survivors of trafficking is very common. As a result of many years in exploitation, victims and survivors may become prone to self-harm, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), bulimia and panic attacks. There have been cases where victims develop Stockholm syndrome and return to their trafficker because they feel he/she is the only person they can trust. The impact of juju also has lifelong psychological effects on victims and survivors, both young and old. This leads victims to be secretive about what happened and also around the trafficking activities undertaken by their traffickers. Victims may refuse to disclose to authorities when questioned due to the fear of horrible death, insanity, or reprisal from a deity.

Apart from the impacts above, for many victims in the UK, their suffering does not end with the exploitation and abuse experienced at the hands of their abusers. Escape from bondage into the real world also leads to new realities. The issue of identity becomes paramount for ex-victims who do not have any proof whatsoever of who they are, their names, countries of origin and dates or places of birth. For this reason, many victims are unable to claim asylum since they are unable to submit papers without relevant proof. As people living illegally in the country, they are at risk of being arrested, detained and deported by the authorities.

In addition, lack of proof of identity and the right to stay in the country means victims are unable to work, sustain themselves and keep a roof over their heads. Condemned to a life-time of poverty, crime and prostitution become the only option for most victims.

For these reasons, the implications of trafficking are not limited to the victims alone. By our own actions as Africans, we are helping to create a growing underclass of marginalised and disaffected young Africans whose lives are being blighted by the activities of fellow Africans in home countries and in the UK. This also means we are helping to propagate suffering and poverty amongst fellow Africans in the country. The UK society also suffers from the impact of trafficking. A growing number of marginalised young people lead to increased numbers of crime being committed. A growing number of disaffected young people create an easy pool of recruits for unscrupulous religious leaders to brainwash and radicalise for selfish purposes.

## IMPACT OF CHILD TRAFFICKING



# 11 Government Action in Tackling Child Trafficking

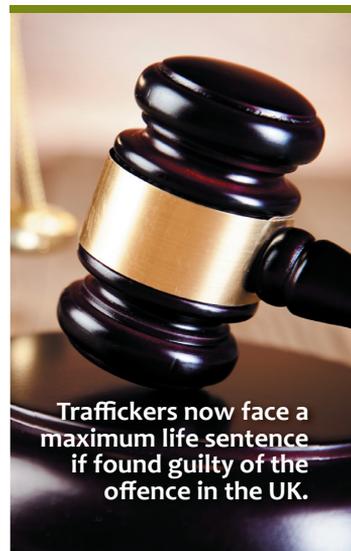
Following the UK Government's ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on Actions against Trafficking, public authorities now have the duty to identify and protect victims of trafficking. One of the key factors in complying with the Convention was the introduction of the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) which provides a framework within which various agencies, local authorities and charities can work together to identify victims of trafficking and provide appropriate protection and support.

Authorised agencies such as Local Authority Children's Services, the Police, UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) and designated NGOs are 'First Responders' and will refer individuals who they think may be evidencing signs of being a victim of human trafficking to designated 'Competent Authorities' such as the UK Human Trafficking Centre (UKHTC) and UKVI (cases of victims from non-EU countries are handled by UKVI) who will work with partners to make an assessment. There are two stages for assessments and decisions. The first is the Reasonable Grounds Decision and the second is the Conclusive Grounds Decision.

The NRM allows victims who have received a Positive Reasonable Grounds Decision to remain in the UK for up to 45 days in order to recover from their ordeal. After this, identified victims of trafficking may be entitled to a Discretionary Leave to Remain which is a temporary residence permit for no longer than 30 months (2.5 years). However, this is subject to them receiving a Conclusive Reasonable Grounds Decision and also depends on the nature of their trafficking experiences. The NRM guarantees the provision of support to victims of trafficking which includes safe temporary accommodation, medical treatment, help in coping with the experience, provision of an interpreter, as well as legal support.

## Modern Slavery Act 2015

In March 2015, the Modern Slavery Act was passed into law specifically to address human trafficking and slavery in the 21st Century. Seen as the first of its kind not only in Europe but in the world. The Act equips law enforcement agencies with resources to tackle the different types of modern slavery. There are provisions to prosecute perpetrators of this type of crime with stringent punishment, including a maximum sentence of life imprisonment. The Act further provides for independent child trafficking advocates to better support child victims of trafficking and for an Anti-Slavery Commissioner to improve and better coordinate the response to modern slavery in the UK.



Traffickers now face a maximum life sentence if found guilty of the offence in the UK.

## 12 Case Studies – Good and Bad Practices in Supporting Victims

### Case Study One: The Age Assessment Dilemma

The case of ‘Child X’ (of Nigerian descent) arrested in possession of false documentation. ‘Child X’ told her criminal solicitor that she was 16 years old. However the Crown relied upon her visa application as evidence that she was 22 years old and she was consequently put in an adult prison. While in prison, she met a ‘Befriender’ whom she recounted her story to. The Befriender contacted AFRUCA because she felt ‘Child X’ could be a potential victim of trafficking. AFRUCA’s assessment of ‘Child X’ in prison revealed the following:

- That she was a genuine victim of trafficking for sexual exploitation, both in her country of origin and in the UK.
- She delivered a baby girl 2 months after she got to prison (victim didn’t even know she was pregnant at the time).
- She was fleeing from her exploitation with an EU passport document given to her by a “helper” which she admitted to.
- She also admitted that she was 16 years old but the authorities did not believe that this was her true age.
- ‘Child X’ also did not understand that she was a victim of trafficking and could get necessary support.

After spending exactly 6 months in prison, Child X was released into foster care. This was after the Crown accepted that ‘Child X’ was a victim of trafficking. After another long battle between two Local Authorities, an age assessment was conducted for ‘Child X’. However, the social worker assessed her to be 21 and not 16 years old and she was moved into an adult accommodation.

### Impact on Victim

- ‘Child X’ feels betrayed and victimised especially after the age assessor concluded that she was 21, and not 16 years old.
- While in prison, ‘Child X’ reported that she was constantly victimised and bullied by some of the inmates.
- She still exhibits high levels of distrust of authorities as she feels no one believes her story.
- She exhibits high withdrawal tendencies and has difficulties communicating and developing a relationship with her case worker.
- She is also made to attend adult literacy classes which she doesn’t enjoy because she says “they are all old people in these classes” and she can’t make friends with any of the people in the group.

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## Case Study Two: Child Trafficking and State Agents

'YP B' was being trafficked to Europe, en-route the UK, for sexual exploitation. She was housed in a flat with other girls who were making the same trip as her. She did not know she was being trafficked as she had been told that she would become a model when she gets to Europe. She only realised what would be her fate after her arrival in the UK when some of the other girls told her their reason for being in the flat. She learnt they were being groomed for sex trade in Europe.

Days after her arrival, she managed to escape from the flat where they were being housed and groomed. With little clothes on and nowhere to go to, someone on the streets who saw her state of distress assisted her to the nearest Police Station. There, the Police Officer on duty contacted Children's Services and other appropriate agencies to support the young girl, and was also able to develop a good relationship with her. Although the girl could hardly express herself or give an account of her experiences at this initial stage, still, he worked to build trust with the young lady after which she felt more comfortable to disclose and give a full statement. This led to a better investigation and the victim received adequate protection and support as well.

### Lessons Learnt

- Frontline officer developed a good relationship with the young person. This made the young person trust the officer and was confident that he had her best interest at heart.
- His understanding of what trafficking was enabled him to better identify, investigate and signpost the young person to relevant services (multi-agency working).
- The relationship built with the young person made it easier for the investigating officer to get details and accounts of experiences of trafficking during her interview.
- Obtaining full disclosure from the young person took a period of time. The young person was not rushed, but was given all the support she needed through multi-agency working. Therefore, the young person was given the freedom to say as much or as little as she could until she was able to share even the very scary details (including the use of juju as part of the trafficking process).

## 13 Successful Trafficking Prosecutions in the UK

Between 2001 to 2015, AFRUCA supported over 300 young African victims of trafficking for different exploitative purposes. The common exploitation types include trafficking for sexual exploitation, domestic servitude, forced labour and forced marriage. Prosecuting trafficking cases can sometimes be a challenging process and many cases never get to trial for lack of evidence that meet the threshold for prosecution. Nevertheless, on occasions where substantial evidence was gathered against a trafficker, such cases were won in favour of the plaintiff (the victims). Below are a few successful prosecution cases where traffickers were found guilty and sentenced to 11 or 14 years in prison.

In 2011, Lucy Adeniji, a pastor linked to the trafficking and exploitation of two of our service users became the first person to be jailed in the UK for trafficking children for use as domestic servants in the country. She was successfully prosecuted and sentenced to 11 and a half years in prison.

In 2013, Odoosa Usiobaifo, another trafficker of one of our services users was prosecuted and found guilty of trafficking teenagers from the UK to be used as prostitutes in Europe. He received a 14-year prison sentence.

Aside from prosecuting traffickers, we also work with young people to ensure they access support services and agencies available to victims of trafficking in the UK. When victims have been denied such support, we also assist our service users to get redress from the court. For instance, we were involved in a civil case where four of our service users launched civil actions against a Police authority for professional negligence in failing to deal with their reports of trafficking and exploitation. The Police were found to be in breach of their professional responsibilities towards the victims and were asked to pay compensation to them.

Some of our services users have also received compensation for failure of State agents to protect them from exploitation.

# 14 Community Action to Address Child Trafficking

Child trafficking is a huge problem demanding responses from every part of the community. As a first step, every member of the community must be able to identify a child victim of trafficking when they see one. They must know what to do to help a victim or prevent child trafficking. They must also know how to report cases to the authorities.

## The Three Steps to Safeguarding Victims

- **Step One** - Know the indicators or signs of child trafficking and exploitation
- **Step Two** - Know what to do to help victims
- **Step Three** - Know how to report cases of trafficking, exploitation and abuse

### Step One - Know the indicators or signs of child trafficking and exploitation

#### Signs of Domestic Slavery

- Unexplained bruises or injuries on different parts of the body
- Does not go to school or, if at all, does not attend school regularly or is always late
- Is always tired and/or asleep in class/does not submit homework
- Does too much work in the house and is left alone with children for long periods
- Has limited freedom of movement, hardly leaves the house
- Does not have a carer to attend parents' evening and other school activities
- Is always hungry and never has money to buy food at school
- Is not taken to hospital when ill or not registered with a GP
- Is always beaten or starved as punishment
- Is working in a restaurant, in a shop or for other businesses all the time, especially when he/she should be at school
- Looks unkempt and uncared for; does not own a winter coat or goes out in the cold with no coat or proper shoes
- Carries heavy groceries from the shops or market every time and hardly ever takes a bus or other transportation
- Looks sad, miserable and does not have anyone to talk to
- Is very afraid of being deported

#### Signs of Sexual Exploitation

- Has a sexually transmitted disease or has tested positive for HIV
- Is pregnant or wants an abortion
- Is always beaten or punished
- Does not go to school
- Does not have a passport or does not have access to a passport

- Is not allowed to go out alone and always accompanied by the trafficker or a representative of the trafficker
- Is driven around by an older man or boyfriend and not allowed to talk to other people or have friends around her
- Lives in a house with an excessive number of men visiting frequently
- Is required to earn a minimum amount of money everyday
- Is exceptionally afraid of being deported
- Has to pay off an exorbitant debt; owes a lot of money for someone their age
- Is withdrawn and refuses to talk
- Is always sad and miserable

***All of the above are only indicators and do not necessarily mean that the child has been trafficked. However these indicators should not be ignored. It is better to ensure a child is safe from possible harm.***

## Step Two - Know what to do to help victims

**Everyone has a role to play in supporting and protecting victims:**

### 1) What is the role of individuals?

- Being vigilant within the community by looking for signs of child abuse and exploitation
- Participating in workshops and seminars that are held on issues of child trafficking to learn more about the issue
- Not turning a blind eye; showing genuine interest in a child you know is being abused and exploited and reporting it to the authorities
- Educating friends, family, faith leaders and others about the damage child trafficking does to victims and the need to eradicate it in our community
- Reporting people you know are trafficking and exploiting children to the Police or other authorities

### 2) What is the role of the African media?

- Writing news articles and holding programmes on radio and TV to help bring the issue of child trafficking to the wider attention of the public
- Inviting policymakers and members of Parliament to speak on current progress being made on the issue of child trafficking
- Generating debates within the community on what can be done to tackle the issue of trafficking
- Educating the community through the different means of communication

### 3) What is the role of our faith organisations?

- Having a fully functioning child protection policy in place to safeguard children and ensure all those working in faith organisations are trained to know the indicators of child abuse and trafficking

- Openly condemning the acts of child trafficking for the purpose of domestic servitude, prostitution and other forms of abuse
- Working closer with children’s charities like AFRUCA and statutory bodies to develop projects that can help educate the faith community and safeguard children
- Having a method of accountability for new churches and newly ordained Pastors to ensure the wrong people are not using religion as a smokescreen to exploit the vulnerable people in our community

#### 4) What is the role of the community at large?

- We must educate our children to protect themselves from abuse and exploitation
- We must be aware of the laws in place to stop trafficking and exploitation of our children and work to ensure these laws are properly enforced
- All those who interact with children in the community must be taught how to recognise children who are victims of trafficking, exploitation and abuse
- We must not be afraid of reporting known traffickers to the authorities
- We must all work together to safeguard our children from abuse, exploitation and trafficking

### Step Three - Know how to report cases of trafficking, exploitation and abuse

**If you suspect a child has been trafficked and is being abused and exploited, here is what you must do:**

#### 1) Get the necessary information. This includes:

- The name of the child, if possible
- The address where the victim is being held
- The name of the trafficker or abuser, if possible
- Keep a record of what you have seen and heard as evidence, if you can

#### 2) Contact the appropriate agency for immediate help. Here is a list of who to contact:

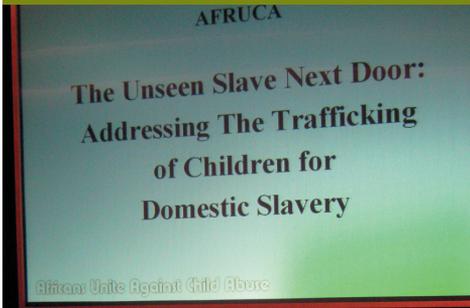
- a) Call your local authority Children’s Services. Contact details can be found on their website or you can dial the council’s main reception and they will be able to direct you to Children’s Services. The number can be found on your council tax papers
- b) Call the Police on the national number 999 if you live in the UK
- c) Call the UK Modern Slavery helpline on **0800 0121 700**
- d) If you are unable to contact any of the above agencies for any reason, call us at AFRUCA on: **0207 704 2261** or **0161 205 9274**, or email us at **info@afruca.org**

## 15 AFRUCA: Our Work on Child Trafficking

AFRUCA is the only Black-led charity in England campaigning against the trafficking of African children in the country. We work closely with others to sensitise the community – both in the UK, other countries in Europe and in Africa, to provide support for child victims of trafficking and to influence relevant governments' policies and regulatory action.

Guided by the four “P’s” as laid down by the Convention on the Rights of the Child: Protection of children, Prevention of violence, Prosecution of criminals and Participation of children in our programmes, we offer the following services as part of our Anti-Trafficking Project across England:

- **Protection and Provision of Assistance** to child victims of trafficking. This is a referral service aimed at helping trafficked children and young people access specialist legal advice, health, education and social care services, as well as provision of emotional and practical support to engage with services. Children and young people who have been assessed to be victims of trafficking receive ongoing one-to-one counselling and support from their caseworker at AFRUCA Monday-Friday (during normal working hours) and during emergency situations.
- **Children’s Participation** through our Survivors Forum, a peer support group for victims to enable young people to provide each other with mutual support and assistance.
- **Theatre/Music for Development Project** offers Drama/Dance and Music as a creative and culturally appropriate alternative to available psychological and therapeutic services. This project seeks to address some of the psychological and emotional needs of the young people using our services whilst helping them to gain new skills.
- **Participatory Video Project** is a unique project that enables young people to use new media to tell their stories of trafficking and exploitation to the outside world thereby contributing to our advocacy work. The underlying objective of this project is about young survivors of trafficking from Africa telling their stories to other young Africans who might be at risk.
- **Prosecution:** We work closely with Police constabularies and other statutory crime agencies. We also often act as expert witnesses in immigration and criminal cases.
- **Prevention and Capacity Building:** Community engagement to enable responses to the crime and enhance the safeguarding of African children/victims. We run regular educational and sensitisation programmes through workshops, trainings and seminars for practitioners and community members to help improve knowledge and understanding of key issues and how to help safeguard victims.



## 16 Useful Contacts

### Services for Child Victims of Trafficking

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#### **AFRUCA Head Office**

Unit 3D/F Leroy House, 436 Essex Road, London, N1 3QP

Tel: 0207 704 2261

Email: [info@afruca.org](mailto:info@afruca.org)

Fax: 0207 704 2266

Website: [www.afruca.org](http://www.afruca.org)

#### **AFRUCA - Centre for African Children and Families**

Phoenix Mill, 20 Piercy Street, Ancoats, Manchester, M4 7HY

Tel: 0161 205 9274

Fax: 0161 205 2156

#### **Local Authorities**

Find the contact details and website for your local council.

#### **UK Modern Slavery Helpline**

Tel: 0800 0121 700

### Services for Adult Victims of Trafficking

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#### **Poppy Project**

Tel: 020 7735 2062

Fax: 020 7820 8907

Website: [www.eavesforwomen.org.uk/about-eaves/our-projects/the-poppy-project](http://www.eavesforwomen.org.uk/about-eaves/our-projects/the-poppy-project)

#### **Kalayaan**

Tel: 0207 243 2942

Website: [www.kalayaan.org.uk](http://www.kalayaan.org.uk)

Fax: 0207 792 3060

#### **BAWSO**

Tel: 029 20644 633

Website: [www.bawso.org.uk](http://www.bawso.org.uk)

Fax: 029 20644 588

#### **Medaille Trust**

Website: [www.medaille.co.uk](http://www.medaille.co.uk)

#### **Migrant Help**

Tel: 01304 218 700

Website: [www.migranthelpuk.org](http://www.migranthelpuk.org)

#### **Refugee Council**

Tel: 020 7346 6700

Website: [www.refugeecouncil.org.uk](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk)

#### **Salvation Army**

Tel: (020) 7367 4500

Website: [www.salvationarmy.org.uk](http://www.salvationarmy.org.uk)

#### **TARA Project (Scotland)**

Tel: 0141 276 7724

Website: [www.communitysafetyglasgow.org](http://www.communitysafetyglasgow.org)

# 17 AFRUCA Resources on Child Safeguarding

We hope you found this booklet useful. There is a lot of information out there that can help you carry out the task of protecting and safeguarding children.

At AFRUCA we have produced a range of materials to help parents, carers, faith and community leaders and workers. Here is a list of publications where parents can get additional information.

## AFRUCA Child Protection Manuals:

- Manual on Child Protection for African Parents in the UK (in English and French)
- Manual on Safeguarding Children for African Faith Organisations in the UK ( in Arabic, English and French)

## Safeguarding African Children in the UK Series:

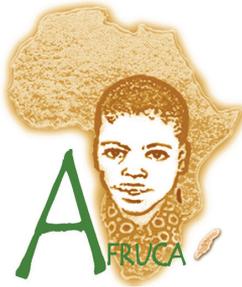
- 1 What is Child Abuse?
- 2 What is Child Trafficking?
- 3 What is Private Fostering?
- 4 What is Female Genital Mutilation?
- 5 What is Witchcraft Abuse?
- 6 What is Physical Abuse?
- 7 What is Sexual Abuse?
- 8 What is Emotional Abuse?
- 9 What is Child Neglect?

## Support our Work: Donate to AFRUCA

Your support will enable us to make plans for long term work to address the abuse and exploitation of African children in the UK and in Africa.

Donations are made securely online at  
[www.justgiving.com/afruca](http://www.justgiving.com/afruca)

You can also donate by text: just text our code **AFRU01** + the amount you wish to give to **70070**. It is Quick, Easy and Free on all networks in the UK!



## AFRUCA – Africans Unite Against Child Abuse

### **AFRUCA Head Office:**

Unit 3D/F Leroy House  
436 Essex Road  
London N1 3QP

**Tel:** 0207 704 2261

**Fax:** 0207 704 2266

### **AFRUCA Centre for African Children and Families:**

Phoenix Mill  
20 Piercy Street  
Ancoats  
Manchester M4 7HY

**Tel:** 0161 205 9274

**Fax:** 0161 205 2156

**Email:** [info@afruca.org](mailto:info@afruca.org)

**Website:** [www.afruca.org](http://www.afruca.org)

### **Our Safeguarding African Children in the UK Series of publications include:**

1. What is Child Abuse?
2. What is Child Trafficking?
3. What is Private Fostering?
4. What is Female Genital Mutilation?
5. What is Witchcraft Abuse?
6. What is Physical Abuse?
7. What is Sexual Abuse?
8. What is Emotional Abuse?
9. What is Child Neglect?