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EVIDENCE
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Prevention of child trafficking and exploitation

A synthesis of Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre funded research on child trafficking and child exploitation (2020-24)

Report 2: BETR Prevention Continuum

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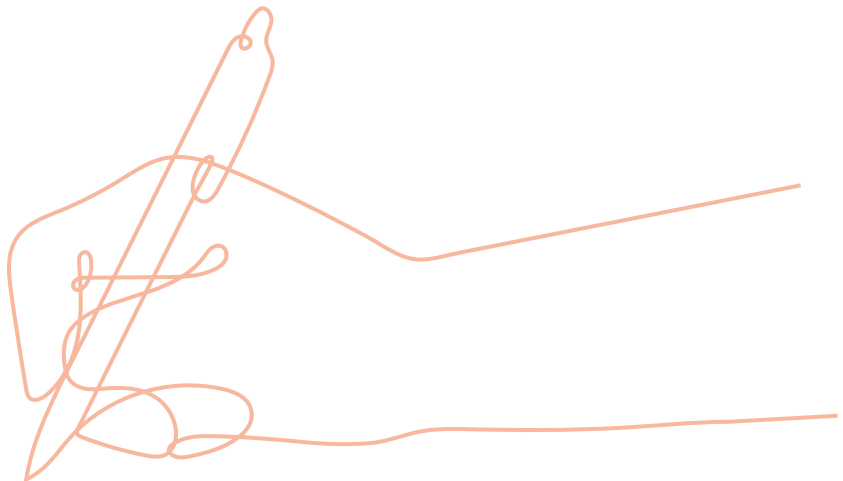Research by:

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1. Introduction

This report is the **second** of a set of three reports which, combined, along with a Research Summary, provide an evidence synthesis of the Modern Slavery and Human Rights Policy and Evidence Centre's (PEC) funded research portfolio on child modern slavery from Phase 1 (2020-24).

This portfolio consists of seven research projects including: (1) a desk-based review of child exploitation prevention measures (Celiksoy et al, 2024) (2) children's experiences of the Scottish Guardianship Service (Grant et al, 2024) (3) an evaluation of the Independent Child Trafficking Guardianship (ICTG) service in England and Wales (Skeels et al, 2024) (4) creating a positive outcomes framework for children (Hynes et al, 2022) (5) a trial of open conversations as a prevention measure for children with SEND in education (Franklin et al, 2024) (6) intersections between safeguarding policies and modern slavery for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) (Franklin et al, 2024) and (7) an exploration of risks for children in Home Office operated hotels (Ayeb-Karlsson et al, 2024).

This report (Report 2: BETR Prevention Continuum) focuses on **the extent to which this Modern Slavery and Human Rights PEC funded research on child exploitation maps onto the BETR prevention continuum** (Such and Aminu et al., 2022), its stages and prevention pathways. We explore what this tells us about the prevention of child exploitation and the BETR continuum and what promising practice can be identified.

2. How does the research map onto the BETR Continuum?

2.1 The BETR prevention continuum

The BETR prevention continuum (Such and Aminu et al., 2022) takes a public health approach to understanding the prevention of exploitation, conceptualising this as **a 'continuum' of four prevention stages** from preventing exploitation 'Before it happens', to 'intervening Early to prevent further harm', to 'Treating harms and preventing Re-trafficking' (see **Figure 1**). This continuous focus on prevention is also conceptualised by Such and Aminu et al., (2022) as a prevention 'cycle.'

Figure 1: BETR prevention continuum and prevention potential

The BETR prevention continuum
Prevent **B**efore and **E**arly then **T**reat and prevent **R**e-trafficking

Preventing exploitation **BEFORE** it happens → Intervening **EARLY** to prevent further harm → **TREATING** harms → Preventing **RE-TRAFFICKING**
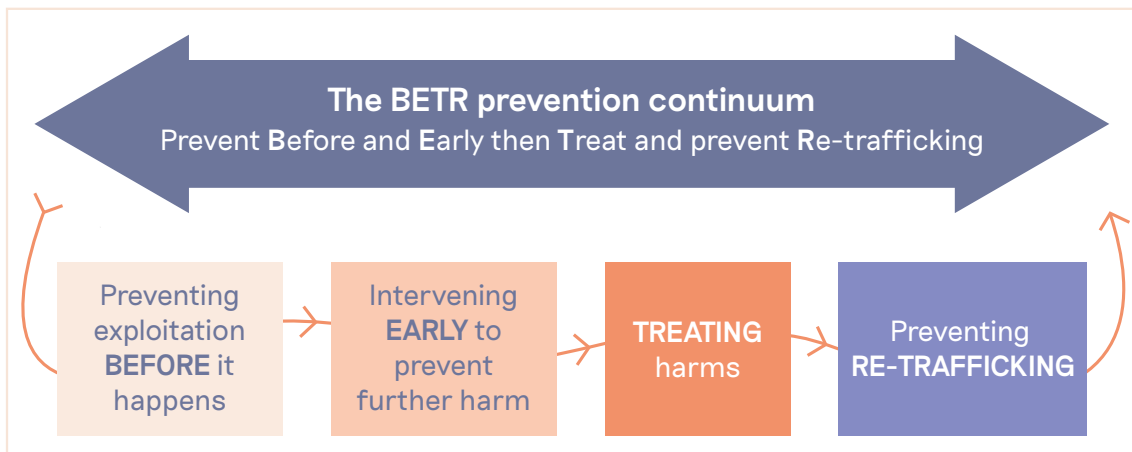
Although developed from research on the prevention of adult sexual and labour exploitation in the UK, this continuum (or cycle) and its prevention stages might also be applied to children. However, since adult-based models and concepts cannot, and should not, be automatically mapped across to children without scrutiny, we explore the BETR prevention continuum as an organising framework for synthesising the Modern Slavery and Human Rights PEC funded research on child modern slavery.

2.2 Applying the BETR prevention continuum

> *'Modern child slavery is alarmingly prevalent. In 2022, 7,019 people exploited[1] as children were referred into the National Referral Mechanism (NRM). Despite the increasing number of children in the NRM, evidence shows that both identification and prevention efforts for trafficked children, and those at risk, are failing.'*
> **Celiksoy, 2024:12**

Modern Slavery and Human Rights PEC's funded research on children clearly communicates the increasing prevalence of identified child modern slavery in the UK, as well as its under-estimation. A focus on a continuum of prevention is therefore an important lens through which to view the evidence from this cohort of reports.

In their study on prevention of modern slavery, Such and Aminu define prevention as:

> *'…an on-going process of avoiding and minimising exploitation and harm. This can be achieved by intervening before exploitation and harm occurs, by intervening early and by treating harms. It also includes action to prevent re-exploitation/re-trafficking. Prevention includes enabling people to exercise choice, control over their lives and to thrive.'*
> **2022:8**

In this dynamic definition, prevention and support are considered as part of the same continuum of preventing harm relating to modern slavery. From this perspective, all Modern Slavery and Human Rights PEC's funded research on children, whether focused on 'prevention' or 'survivor support' can thus be considered as related to prevention.

Stages of the BETR prevention continuum

At a macro level, we can map the focus of the PEC's funded research on children against the **four stages** of the BETR prevention continuum (prevent **B**efore and **E**arly then **T**reat and prevent **R**e-trafficking) (**Figure 2**).

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1. Referrals to the NRM relate to potential exploitation

Figure 2: Child-focused research mapped against BETR prevention stages
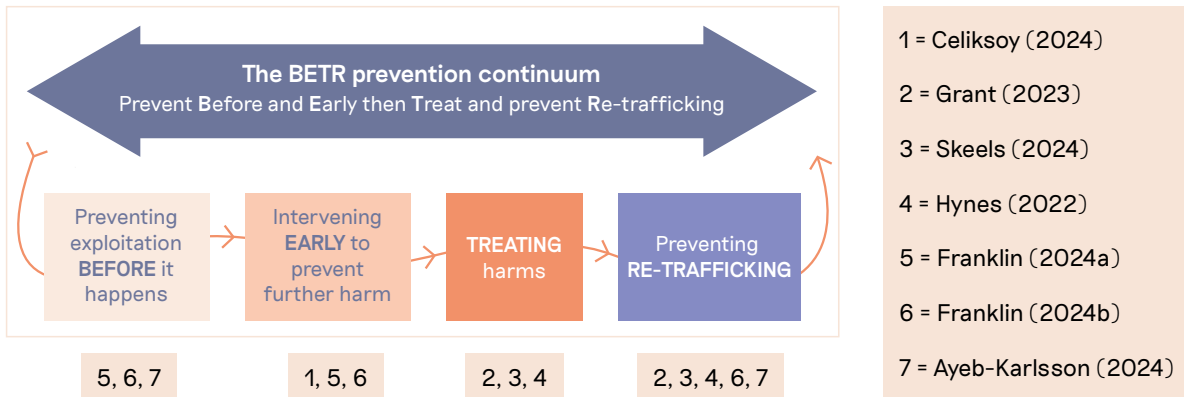
In relation to the above, it is important to note that the 7 projects under review were funded in different Modern Slavery PEC portfolios (survivor support, fellowship and prevention) and thus not all would have had objectives/research questions specifically on prevention (or used a working definition of prevention).

Franklin (2024a) focuses predominantly on prevention **Before harm has occurred**, and in part on **Early** prevention and Celiksoy (2024) on **Early prevention and Early identification** of child exploitation. In a note on terminology, Celiksoy states that 'early identification' is used in the study to refer to children who are at risk and 'victims' of modern slavery, including efforts to identify signs and indicators 'at the earliest possible stage' for timely prevention and protection (2024:9). Prevention for this study is 'used in a broad sense to capture a range of strategies and actions' aimed at preventing exploitation of children and young adults **Before** it occurs as well as prevention of further harm and exploitation.

Grant (2023), Skeels (2024) and Hynes (2022) are all explicitly concerned with **Treating** harm once exploitation has occurred through their consideration of support services and enabling positive outcomes for young survivors of human trafficking. These studies also have a mainly implicit focus on the prevention of *Re*-exploitation, in connection with recovery and the support services provided.

Franklin (2024b) focuses on understanding the **Early identification** of and the response to UK internal trafficking and exploitation of children to inform effective policy and practice. In this sense it cuts across all the prevention stages of the BETR continuum.

Ayeb-Karlsson (2024) is concerned with both the prevention of child modern slavery **Before** harm has occurred as well as the **Re-exploitation** of child survivors of human trafficking, both as the result of placing UASC in adult Home Office hotels. Ayeb-Karlsson (2024) employs the BETR prevention continuum and definition of prevention as a theoretical organising framework for her research.

B **Before any exploitation occurs** is, according to Such and Aminu (2022), the most impactful stage of intervention and prevention within the BETR continuum. Franklin's research on children with SEND (2024b), through a focus on schools as important 'sites' of prevention, provides a strong reminder that this is where we can and should be focusing more attention. The indication is that similar 'deep dives' on preventing exploitation Before harm occurs at 'sites' in other sectors and contexts can help us to better protect children.

E **Early intervention** as noted by Celiksoy (2024) is a term 'not widely used in the literature' and he uses it to apply to both addressing the risk of exploitation Before harm occurs as well intervening Early to prevent further harm. Franklin (2024a) focuses solely on Before harm occurs and keeps these stages of the continuum distinct.

T The two reports focusing on survivor support services, guardianship and the **Treatment of harm** (Grant, 2023; Skeels 2024), while conducted independently on each other, present a mutually reinforcing picture of positive service outcomes from having independent guardianship support for children. This is also echoed in Hynes (2022) where independent guardians and their role is positively described.

R However, what is less explicitly detailed and defined in these three studies (Grant, 2023; Skeels, 2024; Hynes, 2022) is the risk of Re-trafficking, its nature and extent and any mitigation and prevention activity, including what works. Whilst Ayeb-Karlsson (2024) provides a close inspection of the factors contributing to the **exploitation, including Re-exploitation**, of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in her report on children placed in adult Home Office hotels – and explores the contributing and mitigating factors and how to address them – the specific potential vulnerabilities, dynamics and lived experiences of those children who are Re-trafficked is not fully clear.
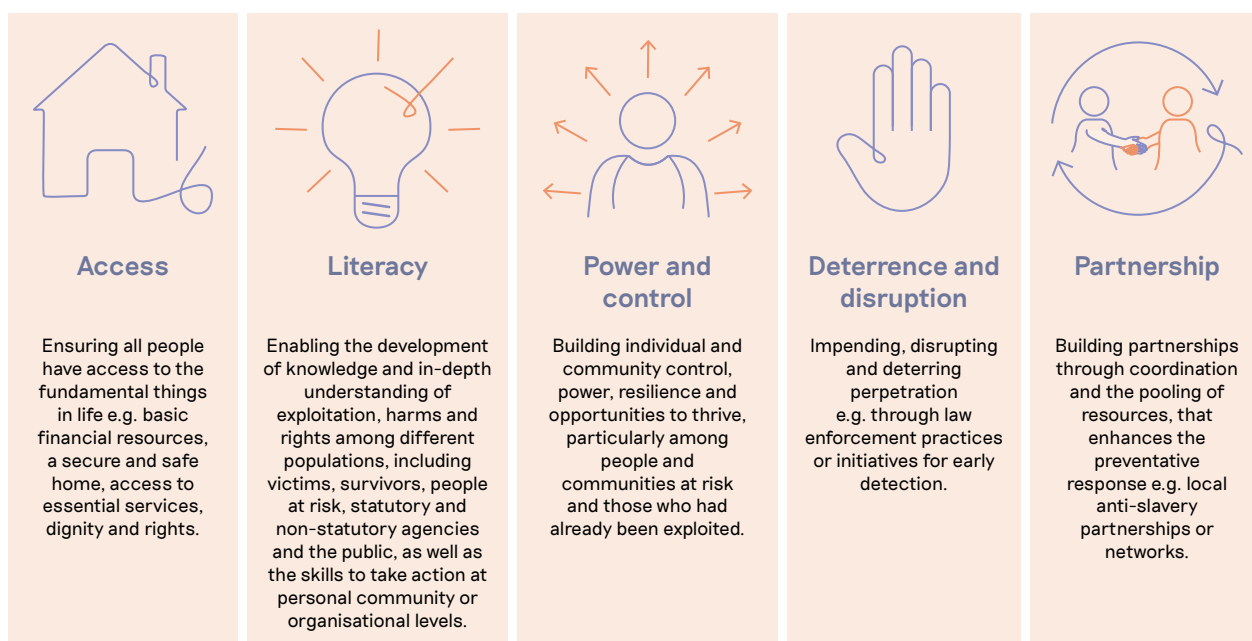
The Re-exploitation aspect or 'stage' of the BETR continuum in relation to child modern slavery in general, therefore, would benefit from further exploration and research.
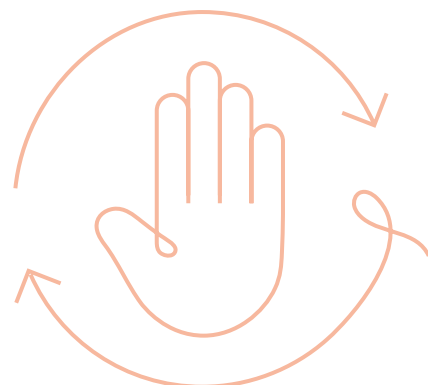
Five prevention pathways

Such and Aminu (2022) set out five mechanisms (or 'pathways') through which prevention is thought to function (not including policy or law). These pathways are characterised as relating to: **Access, Literacy, Power and Control, Deterrence and Disruption, and Partnership.** A description of each is set out in **Figure 3** below:

Figure 3: How prevention functions ('prevention pathways')

Access	Literacy	Power and control	Deterrence and disruption	Partnership
Ensuring all people have access to the fundamental things in life e.g. basic financial resources, a secure and safe home, access to essential services, dignity and rights.	Enabling the development of knowledge and in-depth understanding of exploitation, harms and rights among different populations, including victims, survivors, people at risk, statutory and non-statutory agencies and the public, as well as the skills to take action at personal community or organisational levels.	Building individual and community control, power, resilience and opportunities to thrive, particularly among people and communities at risk and those who had already been exploited.	Impending, disrupting and deterring perpetration e.g. through law enforcement practices or initiatives for early detection.	Building partnerships through coordination and the pooling of resources, that enhances the preventative response e.g. local anti-slavery partnerships or networks.

Although none of the seven child-focused studies explicitly refer to these prevention pathways, this five-category lens can be usefully applied across their evidence-based findings to see where such prevention pathways might align, what this tells us about these lines of enquiry. Where clear, we can also draw out the relevant BETR prevention stage and highlight any promising practice.

1. Access: Ensuring all people have access to the fundamental things in life e.g. basic financial resources, a secure and safe home, access to essential services, dignity, and rights

'Access' as a prevention pathway appears 24 times across the combined findings from the children's research portfolio. There is reference to **'access' both as a protective mechanism, before any exploitation has occurred, in addition to 'access' as a fundamental component of treating harm and recovery.** Further exploration of how access to fundamentals can support early prevention and prevention of re-trafficking, particularly in a cost-of-living crisis, could be productive.

Basic financial resources

B Celiksoy (2024) finds that the socio-economic background of children has a significant impact on potential **risk and vulnerability to exploitation and re-exploitation**, as families experiencing poverty often induces instability for the children (although it must be emphasised that child modern slavery is not unique to children from a lower socio-economic background). Examples include parents who may be absent due to working multiple jobs, families not having secure accommodation or secure access to food, and children not able to maintain education due to an expectation that they will work to help provide for the family. These risks have been exacerbated by the cost-of-living crisis (Edwards, 2023). Franklin (2024b) notes that children with SEND often experience higher rates of poverty.

Secure and safe accommodation

B Celiksoy (2024), Hynes (2022), Franklin (2024b) and Ayeb-Karlsson (2024) find that multiple groups of children and young people, both those at risk of and affected by modern slavery, lack access to a safe and secure home, increasing their potential **vulnerability to exploitation and re-exploitation**. Celiksoy includes in this category: children in families experiencing poverty and instability; unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in 'unsafe and inappropriate accommodation' (2024:19) and looked after children facing both a shortage of and inappropriate housing. Hynes comments on 'age-inappropriate accommodation' (2022:26) for looked after children in relation to increased vulnerability and Franklin on 'unregulated accommodation' for children with SEND, who are also 'over-represented in care' (2024b:4).

Ayeb-Karlsson presents evidence which demonstrates a connection between local authority accommodation and **risk of child trafficking, exploitation and re-exploitation** (Connolly, 2014; Landers et al., 2017 in Ayeb-Karlsson, 2024:10). She is focused on 'the recent and controversial practice' (2024:7) and 'compounded risks' of placing unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) in Home Office' hotels: *'...the vulnerabilities that came with placing children together in public, poorly unmanaged, and badly supervised housing...'* (2024:29). The research finds that the use of hotel accommodation for asylum seeking children increased the risks of both trafficking and exploitation as well as a **re-trafficking risk** for those who had been trafficked into the UK.

T Hynes' Positive Outcomes Framework includes the aspiration that children can sleep safely in their homes and that their accommodation is appropriate to their age (2022: 24).

In a 'spotlight on accommodation' Grant (2023) shows how secure and safe accommodation can lead to other positive outcomes for young people affected by human trafficking. Securing the right accommodation – over time and at different stages of recovery – is a key stepping stone in children and young people's recovery journey. For Grant, this journey can 'span several years' (2023:30) and so support post-18, including in relation to accommodation, is key.[2]

Case closure summary analysis also shows how ICTG service practitioners advocate for suitable placements and housing options including 'Staying Put' arrangements for young people requiring continued foster care support after they have turned 18. A case study included in the report summarises how one young survivor, a carer for his mother – both accommodated in a hotel – was supported to secure more permanent and appropriate housing.

Franklin (2024b) considers accommodation in relation to children and young people with SEND including facing challenges when housed in unregulated accommodation, especially when a long distance from home and the lack of post-18 accommodation and support.

This report also mentions the practice of 'cuckooing' (when criminal gangs target and take over the homes of vulnerable people to carry out criminal and drug related crimes and activities and the person is forced to co-operate) and how research shows a high percentage of incidences involving young adults with diagnosed or suspected learning disabilities, in turn linked to 'austerity, poor housing and reduced services to support young disabled adults by adult practitioners (MacDonald et al, 2022)'(2024b: 24). Safe and secure housing therefore links in turn to basic financial needs being met.

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2. This is already in place in Scotland up to the age of 26 for care-experienced young people, UASC and children who have been trafficked.

PROMISING PRACTICE: Children's accommodation, early intervention and mitigation

Ayeb-Karlsson (2024) explores in detail how the risks associated with children's accommodation environments can be mitigated to improve Early intervention and to prevent (Re)-exploitation (2024:38). Proposed mitigation activity includes:

Implementing appropriate safeguarding measures in the accommodation of children and young people identified as being at risk of trafficking, for example multi-agency development of comprehensive and tailored safeguarding plans for each child.

Not placing a child claiming to be under 18 in adult accommodation where there is any doubt regarding the age of the child, until a comprehensive and fair age assessment has been conducted and the child's age has been verified beyond doubt.

Planning accommodation to ensure that children have separate and secure sleeping spaces and that only authorized DBS-screened staff can enter the buildings and bedrooms.

Improved reporting mechanisms to help prevent child (sexual) abuse and exploitation by staff members or others.

Heightened awareness that individual traffickers and organised crime groups target accommodation housing refugee and asylum-seeking children and youth and use other children to groom their peers.

Proactive measures to enhance security, surveillance, and support systems within accommodation facilities, striking a balance between the right to privacy and children's autonomy and the need for protection.

Access to essential services: a school education

B
E According to multiple studies under review, access to education in a school setting is unique to children and important for their protection Before any harm occurs as well as at an Early intervention stage:

'...parents were very clear that the most significant factor in keeping children and young people safe from Modern Slavery was their engagement with education services.'
Franklin, 2024b:22

Multiple cited sources from Celiskoy's (2024) systematic review and interviewee accounts confirm a lack of access to, or exclusion from, school as a key risk factor for child modern slavery:

> *'…they don't have that routine. Also, they're not having any of those kind of soft outcomes in terms of a sense of belonging, a sense of achievement, a sense of being part of something…'*
> **Interview #17 (2024: 21**

Celiksoy (2024) includes here children who are not able to maintain their education due to an expectation to work / provide for their family. Franklin (2024a, 2024b) notes that children with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) are potentially more vulnerable to school drop-out and exclusion and that potential **vulnerability to exploitation** in relation to education is particularly the case for children with SEND.

Effective Early identification and prevention efforts, notes Celiksoy, recognise the 'critical role of professionals in education' with their 'unique insight' into what is going on both in school and at home and ability to incorporate essential subjects into teaching and learning such as healthy relationships, internet safety, grooming and knife crime (2024:35).

Evidence from the case closure summary analysis from Skeels supports the notion of **education as a protective factor** for young survivors of human trafficking including access to, provision of, participation in and the importance of full and appropriate education ('the right education') (2024:34). Hynes also emphasises **the importance of education for young survivors** participating in the research for achieving positive outcomes and that their 'broad conception of protection includes accessing education' (2022:6). In relation to the Treatment of harm and recovery, the Positive Outcomes Framework co-developed by Hynes (2022) with young survivors includes education-related outcomes including children can attend school promptly, report having access to additional educational support if needed and say their talents are known and supported to grow.

Grant (2023) notes that all young people from the Scottish Guardianship Service interviewed for the research had attended or were currently attending secondary school or college which impacted on positive outcomes. Of the 25 young people participating in the research conducted by Skeels (2024), almost all agreed that, because of the ICTG support service, they had been able to access the education that they need. Those that disagreed had been supported by other professionals or their foster carers to access education. Support to maintain or re-enter education is viewed as part of the Treatment of harm, as well as long-term reduction of further harm and prevention of Re-exploitation for young survivors of human trafficking.

Restrictive immigration and asylum laws and policies are, however, present barriers to educational opportunity for young people. This comes through in Grant (2023) and Skeels (2024), where young people narrated current or past experiences of feeling 'in limbo' in relation to their education until the asylum process was complete. One young research participant in Skeels (2024) said he had not been able to access the education he wanted because of his immigration status. This echoes a young research respondent's feedback in Grant:

'If you think about it, education and being safe, and all that, takes a back seat. Because if you don't know whether you're staying or not, you live in limbo, you can't plan forward, you can't make any plans...'
2023:19

Young people engaged in Hynes' research (2022) also felt their education was limited through discrimination as a result of their status in relation to immigration and asylum and associated difference from other young people.

R **B** **E** Ayeb-Karlsson's research on UASC makes an explicit link between the absence of educational provision in the Home Office hotels where children were placed, which rendered them 'more **vulnerable to grooming and exploitation** by traffickers' (2024:29). For some of the children, this involved re-exploitation and re-trafficking.

Access to rights

T **R** Access to rights and dignity are part of the prevention of exploitation, connecting those at risk up to protection and related interventions. Skeels (2024), Hynes (2022) and Ayeb-Karlsson (2024) speak to how barriers are presented by the systems and processes that children affected by human trafficking are forced to navigate, placing them at risk of exploitation, for example:

'The dangers to young people from asylum and immigration laws, policies and procedures not anchored in the rights of the UNCRC were also addressed by some young people, who considered the risks of being pushed out to the edges of society and towards dangerous and exploitative situations as they are forced to wait through protracted periods of times for their asylum decisions.'
Hynes, 2022:27

And:

'The practice of accommodating unaccompanied children in Home Office managed hotels was…detailed in 2022 by ECPAT UK as presenting a significant protection risk for children and depriving them of their rights (ECPAT UK, 2022)'
Ayeb Karlsson, 2024:20

Support services for children and young people with lived experience of human trafficking help them to understand and access their rights, for example the Scottish Guardianship Service (Grant, 2023) and ICTG service (Skeels, 2024):

'Both direct and indirect workers from the ICTG service enable young people (and the professionals, parents, and carers around them) to understand their rights and entitlements, for example in relation to their status in different formal systems such as criminal justice, immigration and social care.'
Skeels, 2024:38

Understanding, knowing and accessing their rights is essential for children and young people's protection and the prevention of exploitation (Skeels, 2024; Hynes, 2022):

'One thing that would have helped is understanding the law, no one told me they shouldn't have done this to me or explained my basic human rights'
ECPAT UK Youth Advisory Group member 6, session 2 in Hynes, 2022:23)

Hynes (2022) takes a rights-based approach to the research on outcomes for children and young people affected by human trafficking and promotes a rights-based understanding of outcomes which Skeels (2024) also employs. Hynes notes the 'special protection rights which address the distinct needs of particularly vulnerable children' with many relating directly to children who have been trafficked and exploited.

Ayeb-Karlsson also draws on the UNCRC to critique the placement of children in adult Home Office hotels:

'The CRC enshrines specific obligations for states to take measures to prevent violence against children ('VAC'), not solely to prohibit it. These rights create a positive obligation for member states to prevent these offences from taking place rather than solely reacting…' (2024:18)

Through an absence of preventative measures and denial of this right, Ayeb-Karlsson (2024) shows how this increased children's vulnerability to exploitation.

2. Literacy: Enabling the development of knowledge and in-depth understanding of exploitation, harms and rights among different populations including victims, survivors, people at risk, statutory and non-statutory agencies and the general public, as well as the skills to take action at personal, community or organisational levels.

Evidence-based findings in the child-focused portfolio refer to the importance of knowledge, awareness and understanding of modern slavery to different actors or groups. This ranges from an absence of shared definitions and terms relating to child exploitation through to a dynamic and nuanced appreciation – or 'deep literacy' – of the nature of child modern slavery and the risks involved. According to Such and Aminu (2022), it is this 'deep' form of literacy that is required if prevention of exploitation is to be effective.

Awareness and understanding

B The outcomes and thematic literature reviewed by Hynes 'position knowledge, information and understanding of trafficking and exploitation as a key facet of protection' and **prevention of harm** (2022:35). This includes the need for informed professional practice, children better recognising risk, engaging families and communities and improving data collection.

E Although there is 'a growing awareness of the issue' of child modern slavery and there have been 'improved measures to address' a lack of literacy around this (Celiksoy, 2024:5) since the Modern Slavery Act 2015, evidence shows that there is still confusion and misunderstanding (amongst local authorities, social workers, education professionals, parents and carers as well as children and young people) around the definitions of child modern slavery and other fundamentally related terms. This creates gaps in **Early identification** efforts (Celiksoy, 2024:6).

Informed professionals/practitioners

E A lack of awareness and understanding identification amongst professionals, including those who have a statutory duty to identify and support potential 'victims' has important implications for children and young people at risk of or affected by modern slavery. Celiksoy notes that a tendency by professionals and 'local agencies' to over-focus on sexual exploitation and county lines results in limited acknowledgement of less familiar forms of child exploitation. One interviewee in the report states that this can lead to a lack of early identification of children subjected to, for example, domestic servitude, forced labour, and financial exploitation (Interview #3). For another interviewee, the common mistaken belief that trafficking exclusively impacts non-UK nationals hinders the **Early identification** of trafficking of British children (Interview #20) (2024:30).

Celiksoy (2024) documents that while Local Authority referrals to the NRM represent the largest percentage of first responder referrals of 'victims' of exploitation as children, at 47% between 2015-23, some local authorities were not able to share basic information on cases of child modern slavery including location and exploitation type in response to a FoI request.[3] Such gaps in information can limit understanding and prevention.

Celiksoy (2024) also documents a limited understanding of, and variation in, terms such as 'trafficking' and 'exploitation' by professionals and local agencies, resulting in gaps in **early identification of risk and harm**. One interviewee in Celiksoy states that frontline professionals tend to overlook the signs of exploitation because they have a lack of understanding and another interviewee comments that:

> *'A lot of people don't understand what modern slavery is and they don't understand what exploitation is. So, without understanding it, you're not going to know how to identify it.'*
> **Interview #24** (2024:30)

Similarly, Franklin suggests – and this is a key finding from her research, relating to a lack of literacy on both modern slavery and SEND:

> *'When SEND and/or Modern Slavery is not understood, opportunities for prevention and early intervention may not be recognised.'*
> (2024b:19)

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3. It may be that this data was being collected but these Local Authorities did not share it / respond to the FoI.

Children recognising risk

B **E** **Children and young people at risk or survivors of modern slavery** can also have a low level of 'literacy', i.e., a limited awareness, knowledge and understanding of exploitation and related risks and harm to them. Celiksoy (2024) and Franklin (2024a, 2024b) are concerned about the understanding of risk and boundaries by children and young people with SEND themselves. Franklin (2024b) suggests children with SEND take longer to process and recognise exploitation, not considering themselves a 'victim' as they may initially feel an increased sense of control. Franklin (2024a) notes one young person's comments on the difficulty for children and young people with SEND in a school context recognising and communicating about risk and harm.

More broadly, Celiksoy's evidence suggests:

> *'…self-identification as victims of exploitation or trafficking is not common amongst children and young people and that they struggle to comprehend terms like modern slavery and fail to recognise their exploiters as such, especially* in the earlier stages of exploitation.'

And:

> *'…many children and young adults do not recognise they are being exploited, particularly in the early stages of exploitation. In most cases, they think they are making their own decisions (Interview #10). The normalisation of certain behaviours, the emotional manipulation, and the complex dynamics of exploitation contribute to this lack of awareness.'*
> **Celiksoy, 2024:24**

Children's recognition of their own exploitation is influenced by a range of factors including age, cultural background, SEND and type of exploitation. One recurring theme is that the younger the child, the more their understanding of exploitation is limited (Interview #15).

E Parental awareness is also highlighted as a crucial factor, with many parents being unaware of what to look for or the **vulnerabilities** their children may face (Interview #10). Likewise, the public lacks awareness on child exploitation and knowledge about where to report suspicions, contributing to gaps in the **Early identification** process (Interview #18).

T PROMISING PRACTICE: 'Deep literacy' on child modern slavery

Skeels (2024) finds that ICTG service practitioners provide nuanced data and valuable insights on child exploitation, based on their professional experience and current practice. Because of the dedicated focus of the ICTG service on child trafficking and exploitation and the closer relationships between ICTG direct workers and the children and young people they support, these practitioners have a 'deep' literacy on child exploitation and child modern slavery. Evidence shows how this knowledge is shared by ICTG service practitioners with other agencies and professionals, both statutory and non-statutory (Skeels, 2024:46). They:

> '...deliver training and awareness raising and attend / support NRM panels. They challenge and educate others, share relevant resources, think creatively, and help to problem solve. They are a pair of 'fresh eyes,' reframing, and rejuvenating others' perspectives on children and young people with lived experience of modern slavery.'
>
> **Skeels, 2024:46**

A lack of training

T One of the 'lessons learned' from **early identification and prevention** interventions in Celiksoy (2024) is the importance of professional training. The importance of effective training is also echoed in interviews, recommending training for anyone who may have direct contact with children and in a position to identify exploitation, for example, teachers, foster carers, social workers, police, and NHS workers (Interview #8, #11, #12, #14, #15, #16):

> '*I think every organization or professional that comes in contact with young people should have information and training on trafficking identification like hospitals, GP's and pharmacies. Identification should come from every sector.*' – ECPAT UK Youth Advisory Group member 3, session 1
>
> **Celiksoy, 2024:35**

More generally, Celiksoy (2024) highlights 'insufficient or non-existent training provision for first responders responsible for making referrals to the NRM or specific training for local authorities' children's services' on modern slavery which acts as a 'barrier to effective early identification responses.'

T For Franklin (2024a), a lack of training, or inadequate training, is a key contributing factor to a lack of 'literacy' in relation to modern slavery and children with SEND, with no evidence found of training covering both Modern Slavery and SEND, or specialist training for Modern Slavery services on the impact of SEND or for SEND services on the heightened risk of modern slavery. Franklin asserts that the research illustrates that misinterpretations and this lack of understanding or training in SEND needs can lead to exploited children and young people with SEND **not being referred for, or receiving, the right help or response** (2024a:4). Hynes (2022) and Grant (2023) also emphasise the importance of training for good practice in identifying and responding to child modern slavery.

R In the case of UASC placed in adult hotels and subject to (re)exploitation and (re)trafficking, Ayeb-Karlsson (2024) notes as a contributory factor a significant lack of training for Home Office hotel staff. Management of the hotels was sub-contracted, and staffing provided through employment agencies with some staff not receiving appropriate training nor having basic security checks (DBS) in place needed to work with vulnerable children. Staff did not have 'any particular training around identifying trafficking [risks]' and so trafficking indicators were not picked up by those working in the hotels and children were not being **identified, supported and referred** for support.

3. Power & control. Building individual and community control, power, resilience, and opportunities to thrive, particularly among people and communities at risk and those who had already been exploited.

B Children are often associated with a lack of power and control because of their unique stage of maturity and development (although children have agency, capabilities and their own contributions to make). This lack of power creates risk in relation to child modern slavery (Celiskoy, 2024; Franklin, 2024b):

> '*A key risk factor of modern slavery of children is the vulnerability of childhood, as many are targeted simply because of their age, experience, knowledge, and maturity level.*'
> **Celiksoy, 2024:17**

Franklin (2024b) notes that '*SEND brings additional vulnerabilities over and above those related to childhood.*' Children with SEND often have '*high levels of unmet needs and generally a lack of empowerment and agency*' correlating with an '*increased risk of all forms of exploitation*'.

This lack of agency, power and control for **children at risk of or affected by exploitation**, including those with SEND, is, according to the research,

exacerbated by the operation of key organisations, sectors, formal systems and processes that they are required to navigate, in turn related to the legislative and policy contexts that drive them.

Hynes (2022) suggests that the key barriers to achieving positive outcomes for **young survivors** are systemic and structural i.e. the immigration and asylum, criminal justice and social care systems themselves. The impact on achieving these positive outcomes can be different depending on the personal characteristics, for example nationality, of the children and young people concerned. Young people who have migrated to the UK participating in Hynes' study identify restrictive asylum and immigration laws and policies as amplifying trauma, limiting education and employment opportunities, and creating conditions of powerlessness that resonate with their trafficking and exploitation experience.

Grant (2023) also comments on this 'system trauma' in relation to immigration and asylum, with young people in the Scottish Guardianship Service considering it one of the biggest barriers to their ability to recovery following experiences of trafficking. The impact of the asylum process, including being interviewed and waiting for a decision, they report, interferes with nearly all other areas of their lives. Case closure summaries relating to young people supported by the ICTG service in Skeels (2024) show a similar story.

Celiksoy (2024), Skeels (2024) and Hynes (2022) comment on the restrictive UK legislative and policy context within which young survivors' asylum-seeking experiences are situated. In Skeels (2024) all ICTG service regional teams from the ICTG service commented on the challenges of the then recently introduced Nationality and Borders Act (2022) and passing of the Illegal Migration Act (2023), describing this as 'a dire situation, affecting young people and practitioners' and creating 'an increasingly hostile environment' within which to deliver the service.

For Hynes (2022), laws and policies, and their interaction with professional systems and practices, can serve to undermine outcomes for unaccompanied children and young people who are survivors of human trafficking. One example is the time spent waiting (living for years in 'limbo') for documentation or decisions and the negative impact this has on young people's wellbeing, sense of safety and mental health.

Celiskoy (2024) notes professionals' reservations about the impact of legislative changes, such as those introduced by the Nationality and Borders Act 2022 and the passing of the Illegal Migration Act 2023, which may shift the focus toward immigration issues rather than trafficking and exploitation, potentially resulting in fewer **children being identified as potential 'victims' of exploitation** (Doughty Street Chambers, 2021; Garbers, 2023 in Celiksoy). Concerns are also raised about the adequacy of the Children's Act and social care system to address child modern slavery.

Hynes (2022), Skeels (2024) and Grant (2023), however, relate how having independent guardians enables children and young people to better understand and navigate the formal systems and processes they are involved in, thus enabling the **Treatment and recovery from harm.**

Opportunities to thrive

Such and Aminu's (2022) definition of the prevention of modern slavery includes 'enabling people...to *thrive*' [my emphasis]. The research shows that understanding the hopes, aspirations, and goals of children and young people affected by human trafficking, as well as the positive outcomes they can achieve, is instrumental to achieving this.

T Grant (2023), Skeels (2024) and Hynes (2022) all highlight the ways in which outcomes for **children and young people affected by human trafficking** have been narrowly (and often negatively) defined and rarely influenced by the priorities and aspirations of those children and young people themselves.

Engaging **young survivors** in the research, Hynes (2024) co-develops and introduces (and Skeels adapts and employs) a holistic and child rights-based set of positive outcomes that matter to children and young people and their lives. Such research, Hynes suggests, enables us to begin to 'redress gaps in our understanding' related to outcomes and sustainable pathways for children affected by human trafficking and modern slavery (2022:42).

Similarly, Grant seeks to explore the longer-term outcomes and *aspirations* of children and young people supported by the SGS and their own definitions and 'narratives of recovery'.

> **'Young people...described it as a long, even life-long, process; where one is able and feels confident to make and voice choices; has regained a sense of control; has the ability to think about the future and make plans, as well as acknowledging exploitative experiences.'**
> **2023:28**

All young people engaged in the research by Skeels (2024) agreed that the ICTG service has supported them to achieve positive outcomes across a range of outcome areas that were important and mattered to them. The research identifies five distinct 'outcome profiles', associated with groups of young people demonstrating differences in their needs and priorities and illustrating how the ICTG service was able to, effectively and appropriately, address these different priorities and needs.

4. Deterrence & disruption. Impeding, disrupting and deterring perpetration e.g. through law enforcement practices or initiatives for early detection.

It is interesting to note that there is relatively little explicitly on deterrence, disruption or the perpetrators of child exploitation in any of the Modern Slavery and Human Rights PEC's child-focused funded research.

Ayeb-Karlsson (2024) mentions deterrence in reference to alignment of her research with the BETR prevention continuum and its pathways:

'Our framework prioritises community-based and survivor-led initiatives, sharing knowledge and lived experiences. We promote deep literacy through narrative-style interviews and data collection, allowing for an in-depth understanding of exploitation. We also consider pathways of power and control, which focus on resiliency and a deeper understanding of possible pathways for change in affected communities. Additionally, we focus on considering a coordinated systems response involving local partnerships and strategic system-level action plans <u>for deterrence</u> [my emphasis] and prevention.'
2024:17

B
E Franklin, in her analysis of prevention toolkits exploring disruption via young people, notes that 'the focus of most 'toolkits' was disruption of exploitation and assessment of risk (not the early identification of risk)' (2024a:9). In her other Modern Slavery and Human Rights PEC funded study, Franklin (2024b) states that:

'No child should be placed at a long distance from home and specifically not in unregulated accommodation where needs associated with SEND and with risk of exploitation are not supported and monitored. Rather than removing a child from their family or community emphasis should be placed on prevention, disruption and prosecution of offenders.'
2024b:52

T Other isolated instances include Skeels' (2024) mention of ICTG service support workers regularly attending multi-agency meetings, case consultations and trainings where they put forward measures known to be successful in disrupting individuals and groups perpetrating abuse. One case study in Skeels (2024) focuses on the operation of a Slavery and Trafficking Risk Order (STRO) and its benefits in relation to the protection of a child.

Hynes (2022) includes a focus on the perpetrators of human trafficking in her literature search criteria, but this is not given attention in her report.

This picture in part reflects the wider literature on child modern slavery, due to the challenges of conducting research on or with perpetrators of child exploitation. However, this gap has important implications. Our consultation with Modern Slavery and Human Rights PEC's Lived Experience Advisory Panel highlighted a concern around a lack of focus in research on perpetrators and what this implicitly suggests, i.e., that this is not part of the 'agenda' and that the 'burden' of work and generation of solutions then falls on survivors themselves.

5. Partnership. Building partnerships that, through coordination and the pooling of resources, enhanced the preventative response e.g. local anti-slavery partnerships or networks.

T Grant (2023) states that although effective coordination through multi-agency working has long been recognised as facilitating better support for children and young people, this remains an area of concern in relation to child modern slavery. Professionals engaged in the research emphasised the continued need for clear coordination between agencies and consistency of services across the country.

T Celiksoy (2024) also notes a lack of interagency communication and coordination between first responders, a significant barrier to the **early identification** of exploitation. Agencies, the evidence suggests, often fail to communicate with each other, leading to issues such as a lack of information sharing for early identification purposes. The complex legislative terrain and overlapping local duties further complicate efforts. This includes a deficiency in communication between central government and practitioners on the ground. Resourcing and staffing issues across agencies are also a challenge.

Celiksoy's (2024) analysis of published local authority policy documents demonstrates that child modern slavery and exploitation are more substantially addressed in multi-agency working documents. In these documents, child modern slavery concerns usually shape the whole of the policy and ensure a comprehensive approach from identification to prevention and protection, i.e. across the whole BETR continuum. By contrast, other policy documents either do not engage with child modern slavery or exploitation, or peripherally address them.

B Franklin (2024a, 2024b) also highlights the gaps in coordination and joint working in relation to children with SEND including in education settings. For Franklin (2024b) such a siloed and uncoordinated approach means that there is little recognition of increased vulnerability and risk facing children and young people within SEND in policy and guidance, and discussion of appropriate preventative measures and response.

T Conversely, in Skeels (2024) and commented on by Hynes (2022), independent guardians act as connectors and coordinators, linking up different agencies and services around the child who has **lived experience of human trafficking**. Both direct and indirect worker roles within the ICTG service are identified as critical coordination points, supporting the navigation of complex systems, mobilising services and connecting professionals to drive positive outcomes for children and young people. Hynes (2022) also notes that young people engaged in the research highlighted the importance of independent advocates or guardians who could provide links between them and the services they need.

3. Key takeaways and recommendations

There is merit in exploring the application of the BETR prevention continuum – its definition of prevention, prevention stages and pathways – to research on children, child trafficking and child exploitation.

Recommendation: Support a continued, critical consideration of the BETR prevention continuum to help frame and inform future commissioned research on child exploitation and child trafficking.

This will enable:

- A broader definition of prevention which includes recovery and support for young survivors of human trafficking, as well as an explicit focus on the prevention of Re-trafficking. Recommendation: Encourage and support a broader definition of, and maintain an explicit drive and continuous focus on, the prevention of child exploitation and child trafficking.

- A means of identifying gaps in the research in relation to prevention of child exploitation and child trafficking, for example:

  - limited focus on the risks, nature and consequences of Re-trafficking of children
  - lack of detail related to children going missing
  - limited evidence on deterrence, disruption and perpetrators of child exploitation and child trafficking (one of the five 'prevention pathways')
  - what works in terms of multi-agency working and partnership (another identified pathway to prevention)

Recommendation: Enable the commissioning of new research addressing gaps in evidence on child trafficking related to the BETR continuum, for example a deliberate, deeper exploration of the risks, nature and consequences of the re-trafficking of children and, in connection with this, children 'going missing' (somewhat a 'black box' in child trafficking research and evaluation) to drive increased accountability and targeted effort in this domain.

Recommendation: Build on the limited evidence from Phase 1 on deterrence, disruption and perpetrators of child trafficking (one of the five identified pathways to prevention), which whilst reflecting a broader research and evidence imbalance in the sector, is highlighted as a gap to address by the Modern Slavery and Human Rights PEC Lived Experience Advisory Panel. Recommendation: Help commissioned research to connect to and build on

existing adult-focused literature on what works in terms of multi-agency working and partnership (another identified pathway to prevention) with potential for application to the prevention of child trafficking field.

- A way of investigating how the prevention of child modern slavery is different in nature, involves different definitions (for example, of 'recovery' and 'outcomes'), actors (for example, teachers, parents and carers), spaces and 'sites' (for example, schools) timescales (for example, children don't conceptualise outcomes in terms of the short, medium and long-term) and understanding compared to prevention of adult modern slavery to be effective.

Recommendation: **Enable further exploration of how the prevention of child trafficking is different in nature, involves different definitions (for example, of 'recovery' and 'outcomes'), actors (for example, teachers, parents and carers), spaces and 'sites' (for example, schools) timescales (for example, children don't conceptualise outcomes in terms of the short, medium and long-term) and understanding compared to the prevention of modern slavery of adults to be effective, and thus how different interventions and policies and re-thinking around timescales and contexts are required.**
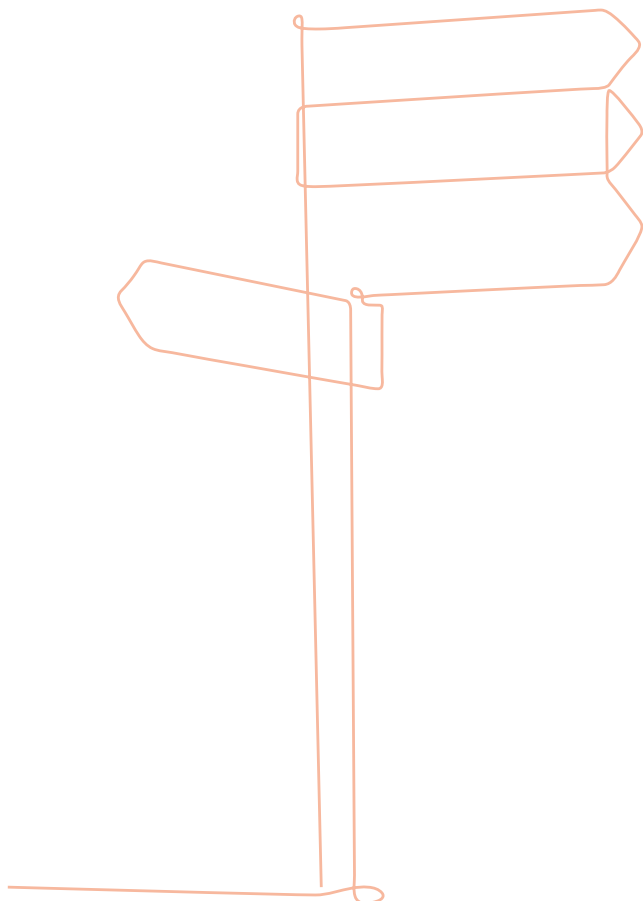
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