



# TRAFFICKING FOR SEXUAL EXPLOITATION IN WALES: UPDATE 2010

## AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

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## 1 Introduction

In 2007, Amnesty International in Wales published *Under the Covers*, the first report aiming to provide a snapshot of trafficking for the sex trade in Wales. Over the last few years we have continued to work with stakeholders across Wales to raise awareness of trafficking and to attempt to gauge the scope and nature of the issue in Wales. This short briefing provides an update on that work.

Amnesty International is very grateful to Rhian Were for all the work she undertook in the preparation of this update.

## 2 Under the Covers 2007

The report was based on interviews with senior police officers, NGOs and service providers, media reports, court actions and information provided following Operation Pentameter, the first cross-UK action by the police to tackle sex trafficking. The findings indicated that there had been a number of instances of women trafficked into the sex trade in Wales, and that this phenomenon was not limited to larger cities, but occurred across Wales. The findings also showed how each of the four police forces dealt with the situation in a different way, and though there was considerable good will to assist victims, the different ways of working and the limited services available led to very different outcomes across Wales.

The nature of the sex industry and sophistication of the trafficking gangs leads to significant under reporting of this issue, and estimates of the numbers involved in Wales varied considerably from official figures of trafficked victims. Following qualitative research across Wales, our estimate was that there may be 150 women in Wales who had been trafficked.



Identification of victims as having been trafficked was clearly an issue, as was co-operation by potential victims with the authorities. Awareness of the issue amongst police forces and service providers varied widely across Wales.

The report also outlined the proposed policy changes that would be brought about following the UK Government's implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, and highlighted those areas of responsibility that would fall to the Welsh Assembly Government.

Devolved responsibilities focus around support for victims such as secure accommodation and welfare services. Following the publication of the report and subsequent campaigning, the Assembly Government committed to set aside funding for a project to assist victims of sex trafficking.

### **3 Operation Pentameter 2**

Operation Pentameter 2 (UKP2) was initiated by the UK Human Trafficking Centre (UKHTC) and overseen by Gloucestershire Constabulary. It was launched on 3 October 2007 and involved 55 police forces throughout the UK, including the four police forces in Wales. Operations continued until July 2008, with investigations ongoing. Across the UK, the operation included visits to 157 massage parlours and saunas, and 582 visits to residential properties. Some 167 victims of trafficking were rescued and 528 arrests were made. Thirteen of the victims were children with the youngest aged just 14 years old. The majority of victims originated from China, South East Asia, and Eastern Europe.<sup>1</sup>

In Wales, two people were rescued during these operations: a 17-year-old Lithuanian girl was rescued from premises in Newport, and a Bulgarian woman in her early 20s was rescued from a massage parlour in Swansea.

### **4 Action across Wales**

*Under the Covers* highlighted the different way in which police forces in Wales dealt with the issue of trafficking. Though all forces were keen to tackle the issue, the level of awareness and intelligence in these areas was very different. Some forces had developed a relatively sophisticated, if ad hoc, method of engaging with the sex trade in Wales. Our research since 2007 has indicated that all four forces now take a closer interest in 'monitoring' the sex trade in their area and are gathering more intelligence on trafficking.

#### **4.1. Gwent Police Area**

Gwent Police have developed an approach to the sex trade in their force area involving building intelligence through visiting 'off-street premises', and working with other public bodies and NGOs, with the aim of providing sex workers with a channel out of prostitution.

Gwent Police believe that prostitution is mainly confined to the Newport area, and is believed to be less than in other towns of comparable size, partly due to the strategy deployed.

The strategy clearly works within a framework of an acceptance that the focus of the police should not be to end the sex trade, but to seek evidence of underage workers, drugs, coercion or vulnerable women. Since the visitation programme began, Gwent Police have closed down three premises – although the view is maintained that the closure of premises can push prostitution onto the streets, which poses far greater dangers to sex workers.

A strategic trafficking group meet quarterly to share and look at intelligence coming in, and includes representation from the police, social services, Barnados, Kaleidoscope, and health agencies. During UKP2 intelligence surface regarding a woman linked to an off-street brothel in the Maindee area of Newport, a case that led to the disruption and dismantling of an international prostitution ring (see Case Study: Operation Adject).

Outreach workers from local charity Women in Need provide support to women in prostitution in the Newport area through brothel visits – giving out contraception, dealing with homelessness, and fast-tracking women into treatment. Women are also able to access a confidential GUM clinic scheme. Outreach workers accompany police on operations into brothels, being able to provide them with information and intelligence and allowing both the brothels and workers to be monitored. The women share information with the outreach workers regarding, for example, signs of paedophilia in clients, or suspected trafficked women. The outreach workers believe the visitation programme works well and provides protection to women. A good relationship has developed between them and the sex workers, and a level of trust has been built up to enable the

<sup>1</sup> Home Office Press Release, 02/07/08.



workers to feel able to contact the Police directly if for example an assault has taken place, with named Police officers with direct telephone numbers available as points of contact for each area in Newport.<sup>2</sup>

Police officers are provided with training from the UKHTC, and at a local level provided with training to enable officers to identify prostitution. Senior police officials at Gwent Police suggest that a new way of tackling prostitution may be beneficial, and that the Swedish model, where the buying of sexual services is made illegal, could be a way forward.

#### **Case Study: Operation Adject**

Operation Adject began in September 2007 following a co-coordinated national search for the victim. The Lithuanian woman was 17 years old at the time of entry into the UK in July 2007, an already vulnerable female who was recruited from a children's home in Lithuania, having been promised work as a cleaner or in a shop. She had arrived via Dover Port with three or four other women and was taken to a brothel in Manchester and handed over to a member of the gang, Albanian Xhevdet Cikaj, who told her she would have to work as a prostitute. When she refused and asked to return to Lithuania she was imprisoned, terrorised, and forced to comply. When she attempted to escape she was beaten and threatened by Xhevdet Cikaj and Lavdrim Cikaj. After being forced to work as a prostitute in Manchester she was 'sold on' to two other members of the gang in Newport for £2,000. Lithuanian-born Edita Tavoraite and Tafil Kadria told the victim she would pay off her 'debt' by working as a prostitute. At some point when in Wales, she contacted the home and said that she did not want to be where she was and that she wanted to come back. The woman was rescued from a premises in Newport by local police, who worked with SOCA's Vulnerable Persons Team to ensure the victim was cared for and referred to the Poppy Project in London.

A coordinated operation led by SOCA and involving Gwent Police, South Wales Police, Greater Manchester Police, South Yorkshire Police, UKHTC, and Lithuanian Police led to the disruption and dismantling of the international prostitution ring involved in the trafficking of the young Lithuanian woman. In September 2008 a number of arrests were made and in June 2009, as a result of the evidence provided by the victim, four gang members Lithuanian Edita Tavoraite, and Albanians Tafil Kadria, Xhevdet Cikaj, and Lavdrim Cikaj were together successfully convicted of "trafficking persons within the UK for sexual exploitation and control of prostitution for gain", and sentenced to a total of 31 and a half years in prison. It was disclosed in court that the young woman will never be able to return home because of the shame she feels from her ordeal.<sup>345</sup>

#### **4.2. South Wales Police Area**

South Wales Police carried out raids during UKP2 on a number of premises in city locations. Out of 14 women initially treated by Police as victims, one was identified as a victim of trafficking for sexual exploitation.

The victim was a Bulgarian national in her early 20s and rescued from a massage parlour in Swansea. She was suspected as having been trafficked based on intelligence reports submitted during UKP2, but was unwilling to provide any information at all to the Police and denied having been trafficked. She was provided with immediate care using the Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC). She refused further services, and at her request and through the SARC, she was repatriated to Bulgaria. Three arrests were made relating to this case and the suspects questioned at length, but due to a lack of evidence and unwillingness of behalf of the victim to cooperate with Police to give evidence, no charges were brought against them.

In another operation (not police-led, but with police involvement in terms of victim care) that was not specifically looking for trafficked women and involved raids on a couple of massage parlours, thirteen Eastern European women were removed from premises and initially dealt with as victims, despite denying they had been trafficked.

A protocol for victim identification and provision of services has been in place since Operation Pentameter 1 in 2006. All foreign nationals recovered from such premises are dealt with as potential victims and provided with all services and an interpreter on an individual basis. The women were taken from the premises to a

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Outreach Worker for women in prostitution, Women in Need (15/07/09)

<sup>3</sup> *Bordering on Concern – Child Trafficking in Wales, ECPAT UK 2009.*

<sup>4</sup> Serious Organised Crime Agency press release (19 June 2009)

<sup>5</sup> Interview with officer from Gwent Police (02/06/09)



place of safety and spoken with at length individually. They were subsequently identified as not being victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation and as such were free to leave police care.

In order to raise awareness of trafficking, officers on the street are briefed on what to look for and provided with training regarding trafficking. Despite ongoing intelligence gathering, no intelligence reports have been submitted since UKP2, and no further premises raided, therefore police believe that it is difficult to assess whether trafficking for sexual exploitation has increased in the area. It is considered, however, to be an under-reported crime and it is hoped that raising awareness of the issue will encourage more reporting of suspected trafficking.

Police stress that it is important that information is passed through the correct channels so that the police can be made aware of possible victims of trafficking which may explain discrepancies between the number of women encountered by voluntary organisations and the police.

The National Police Improvement Agency has produced a training package specifically dealing with trafficking, and from 1 April 2009 NPIA has incorporated this into probationary police training for all forces in Wales. A Detective Inspector is responsible at a senior level to raise awareness within the force and specialist courses are available generally for Detective Superintendent level upwards. The Witness Care Officer also holds talks with Public Protection Unit, and sits on the Witness Care Working Group for Victims of Trafficking.

South Wales Police chair the Operational Working Group for UKHTC, which meets quarterly, and forces nationwide are invited to attend. Due to the confidential nature of discussions held, this is solely a police working group (generally from DI/DCI level upwards), which deals with trafficking for any purpose of both adults and children. In April 2009 the first two-day Operations Conference for practitioners was hosted in Cardiff, in co-ordination with and funded by the UKHTC. 140 delegates attended, including representation from the majority of UK Police Forces, the Garda Síochána, Dutch Police, and Serious Organised Crime Agency<sup>6</sup>.

Since 2007, BAWSO have seen four cases of women who were sexually exploited in the South Wales area – one from Jamaica, two from Pakistan, and one from Libya. All four women were brought to the country and forced to have sex with men against their will.<sup>7</sup> These women were referred to BAWSO by other voluntary agencies, rather the police.

### **4.3. Dyfed-Powys Police Area**

Although Dyfed-Powys Police force was involved in UKP2 and carried out a number of raids, it is not thought there is a substantial sex industry in the area. The force has found little intelligence of a significant sex trade or organised crime in the area.

At the time of UKP2 some intelligence came in resulting in a raid on a lorry premises in Pembroke Dock, with intelligence suggesting that a Polish woman had been brought in to facilitate prostitution. No evidence was found to support this claim.

There is some intelligence regarding the ports in West Wales being used as entry points for trafficked victims. A number of arrests were made during the UKP2 operation, though these were cases of foreign nationals arriving at ports with no provisions or money and they were not treated as victims of trafficking. Concerns were raised that individuals coming into the country illegally in search of work with no provisions could possibly end up inadvertently in the sex industry.

During UKP2 four young males, initially treated as illegal immigrants, were then thought to be possible victims of trafficking, after being discovered in lorry parks around West Wales. The boys were aged between 13 and 15 and from Afghanistan. Three were discovered in Pembroke Dock, and one in a lorry park in Cross Hands, Carmarthenshire. The police liaised with Child Protection Teams to provide the children with all services, in line with Pentameter protocols. It was later discovered that they had been fleeing the war in Afghanistan and had boarded the back of lorries in France. Although they had all come to the UK together, they had been separated in their attempt to get to London. Despite having a UK telephone number on them, following investigation no evidence was found by the police of any involvement in the children's arrival in the UK. Working with Social Services, the boys were put in care and have been housed with Afghan families.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Interview with lead officer for UKP2, South Wales Police. (06/05/09)

<sup>7</sup> Interview with BAWSO, Cardiff. (29/05/09)

<sup>8</sup> Interview with senior officer from Dyfed-Powys Police. (03/06/09)



Dyfed Powys police were involved in the case against a couple based in Castlemartin that involved trafficked women. The defendants were not convicted of trafficking, but were convicted of running a large number of brothels in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Among the women working in the 35 brothels that they ran, six young Nigerian women had been trafficked and were being coerced, though investigations continue to find the traffickers responsible for bringing the women from Nigeria to Ireland.

It is felt that not enough support is provided at ports and borders to deal with possible trafficking, with a lack of representation from the UKBA, an issue that has been highlighted by ECPAT UK<sup>9</sup>, and that raising awareness of the trafficking needs to be a priority. Training has been provided to around 200 Dyfed Powys police staff, including Neighbourhood Policing teams, through DVDs from partner agencies. Presentations are given to ports officers, and operations to raise awareness about trafficking run for a few months at a time at ports.

Dyfed-Powys Police have given presentations regarding trafficking to Women's Aid groups in the area, and Social Services. Although a presentation was given to Social Services in Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire, the other two counties did not take up the offer of training.

#### **4.4. North Wales Police Area**

North Wales Police undertook surveillance of licensed sex premises as part of UKP2. Although there are off-street premises in the area there is little or no street prostitution. Neighbourhood Policing teams may routinely visit premises. It is felt that trafficking offences are more numerous than the evidence suggests.

During UKP2 raids were carried out on premises in urban areas in North Wales, and three female Chinese nationals (aged 24 yrs, 39 yrs, and 40 yrs) were removed from a massage parlour, and initially treated as victims of sex trafficking. The women refused, however, to accompany police to the SARC, refused all services offered to them, and all asked to be conveyed to a local train station. No referrals were made and the whereabouts of these women now is unknown.

One male was arrested in connection with these women but was released due to there being no evidence to prosecute him.<sup>10</sup>

Since UKP2 there has been a further case of a suspected victim of trafficking following police raids on licensed premises. A massage parlour was raided and a 48 year old Chinese national, believed to be a victim of trafficking, initially agreed to accompany officers to the local SARC to speak with trained staff. However upon arrival at the SARC the female asked to be taken to a local train station, and she was not referred to any organisation. No details are known of her whereabouts.

In July 2009 a 24-year-old Chinese female arrived in the UK from the Republic of Ireland without travel documentation. The female stated to UKBA that she had been a victim of trafficking in Ireland. She was provided with accommodation in North Wales and referred to the Welsh Refugee Council.

More recently there was a case of a Chinese woman who was residing in a Local Authority hostel, and after giving birth, disappeared. Intelligence suggested to police that the woman had been working as a prostitute and may have been abducted by traffickers, as she was not in the country by legal mechanisms. She was located, however, and found in the house of a Chinese family in the North of England.

Since July 2008 (and operating partially since May 2008) Specially Trained Officers (STOs) have been in place to deal with all victims of sexual assault of any kind, which includes trafficked persons.

North Wales Police received a national two-week training package related to trafficking, and locally receive training packages from the UKHTC. STOs and all probationary officers receive training in trafficking. All officers at Holyhead Port also receive training from the NSPCC specifically related to trafficking, with feedback very positive feedback from port staff. This training was designed to reinforce the importance of trafficking, as it previously has not been treated as a priority.

As with Dyfed-Powys Police, the concern was raised that the UKBA do not have a permanent presence at the ports, with often only two police officers present to check all of the arrivals. A joint intelligence unit between North Wales Police and the UKBA has now been established, with the intelligence unit's office based in Mostyn Docks covering the ports and borders in North Wales. However, there are hundreds of entry ports in North Wales and it was stressed that these will never be representation at these – with any activity

<sup>9</sup> *Bordering on Concern – Child Trafficking in Wales, ECPAT UK 2009.*

<sup>10</sup> Interview with officers from North Wales police. (02/09/09)



being intelligence-led. North Wales Police identified the need for further training, and the simplification of guidance, noting that a 35-page document needs to be consulted during the process of victim identification.

North Wales Police feel that the quality of service and investigation has improved significantly since 2007, with police identifying the tackling of sexual crimes as a priority and each division having specialist officers and teams to deal with these issues. The biggest difference has been the creation of STO posts to ensure more consistent and better-trained officers available to deal with these crimes. The establishment of the North Wales SARC has also assisted in provided services to potential victims, and it is understood that the number of victims withdrawing support to the Police has decreased dramatically since these changes were implemented.

## 5 Services for Victims of Trafficking in Wales

Thought commitments were made by the Welsh Assembly Government to support victims of trafficking following the publication of the 2007 report, there has been a mixed, though mainly positive, outcome for confirmed victims of trafficking in Wales.

In 2007, the Assembly Government identified £500K for Safer Wales to fund a refuge in Cardiff for victims of trafficking. It is understood, however, that this project is not limited to trafficked victims, but is a general project to help women leave the sex trade, or those with no recourse to public funds<sup>11</sup>. The refuge will be based in Cardiff but available to women across Wales, with up to four units available through available housing stock. The funding will provide a drop in centre and immediate emergency accommodation to women fleeing sexual exploitation, with further accommodation made available through the provision of guaranteed housing stock, not of a fixed location.

The refuge will be a first port of call for referrals from e.g. Police, Social Services where emergency accommodation is required, and subsequently women could be referred on to BAWSO/Poppy Project for the provision of further support and services. Women will have the opportunity to become tenants and be permanently housed if they were to become happy in the accommodation provided, with subsequently more housing stock made available for further referrals.

It is hoped that the dedicated 'safe space' or drop in centre will be the first point of contact for a wide range of women, not just trafficked women, and that street prostitutes will be encouraged to use the safe space as their own.

In March 2009, the UK Government announced it was to award £3.7m to the Poppy Project to expand their support services for victims of trafficking. This new investment is intended to increase the number of beds available nationally from 35 to 54. In Wales, BAWSO were awarded £120,000 per annum for two years as part of this investment, to develop the Diogel project, aiming to protect, assist, and support victims of trafficking in Wales.

The refuge supports five women over the age of eighteen who have been trafficked into the UK, sexually exploited in the three months prior to referral, and forced to work in prostitution in the UK. Two senior support workers work closely with agencies and specialist support providers utilising a multi-agency protocol<sup>12</sup>, with services to include:

- sexual health and counselling (Cardiff SARC)
- legal advice through one identified partner
- health services (Cardiff Health Access Project)
- assisted voluntary returns (International Organisation for Migration)
- language support, advocacy, and risk management support planning through BAWSO.
- financial assistance.

Since December 2009, the Diogel project has helped 10 women, though not all have been referred from within Wales. Most women are in their twenties and have been trafficked from Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe.

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<sup>11</sup> Interview with Safer Wales. (25/08/09)

<sup>12</sup> Interview with BAWSO. (29/05/09)



## 6 Conclusion and Recommendations

Trafficking for sexual exploitation continues to be a part of the sex trade in Wales, though it remains an under-reported crime within an illegitimate, though tolerated, industry.

There is no doubt that there are many foreign nationals involved in the sex trade in Wales, though not all have been trafficked here or are being coerced. That said, the level of exploitation and fear suffered by victims of this complex crime means that even those women who come into contact with the police or other service providers are often unwilling to co-operate.

The full picture of the scope and nature of human trafficking is likely to remain unknown whilst the sex industry continues to operate in relative secrecy whilst also being accepted as part of modern society.

Police forces in Wales have continued to progress in their methods of engaging with the sex industry in an attempt to tackle trafficking and coercion. There are excellent examples of good practice and some very clear goodwill from senior officers to tackle this crime. That said, there remains a variance across Wales in the nature of policing, in terms of deployment, guidance and priority, on this matter.

Progress has also been seen in services for victims, with the establishment of the first refuge for trafficked women. Progress at a local level is more mixed, with some excellent services delivered by NGOs, statutory projects such as SARCs, and better awareness of the issue in a small number of local authorities. There is, however, considerable variation in access to local services.

Amnesty International believes that there is still much to be done on a pan-Wales basis to ensure that we adequately tackle the scourge of human trafficking for the sex trade. In taking on the traffickers, we need to deal with some non-devolved matters, such as developing consistent policing guidelines, and some devolved matters, such as providing services for victims at a local level. Some elements, such as victim identification, remains very unclear, and we would refer to the recently published report by the Anti-Trafficking Monitoring Group on improvements needed in terms of the National Referral Mechanism.

The Welsh Assembly Government must take responsibility for leading change on a pan-Wales basis, and a focus on implementation is required to ensure that all agencies across Wales are delivering to the highest standards in order to protect women facing violence and exploitation in the sex trade.