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YOUTH JUSTICE

An Insight Into Child Trafficking

**An interview about Child Trafficking with Laura Duran –
Head of Training, ECPAT**

**Chapter Three - Children exploited into cannabis
cultivation**

(transcript of [video](#))

A **Lynda Gibbs:** I want to ask you now about cannabis cultivation; is it right that the majority of children involved in that activity in the UK are Vietnamese and Albanian children?

B **Laura Duran:** As far as ECPAT UK is aware of the majority of children who are being identified as being trafficked for cannabis cultivation are predominantly Vietnamese children, and we have seen a rise in Albanian children also being recruited into that form of exploitation.

C **Lynda Gibbs:** And how do they get involved? How does that happen?

D **Laura Duran:** Well they can be recruited through all sorts of different means, often there's an element of debt bondage involved with these kinds of highly organised criminal networks. They might be promised a job, or they might be promised a way in which they can assist their families back home, they might be threatened once they realise what sort of work they are actually doing into remaining in exploitation.

E Or they might just be too afraid of coming into contact with the authorities because of the fear of being criminalised and removed to their countries of origin.

F **Lynda Gibbs:** Now this might sound like a really silly question but who looks after those children?

G **Laura Duran:** Well whilst the children are in exploitation no-one nobody is looking after them; they're actively being exploited. They might be in the cannabis farm with for example another adult who is also being exploited, or with another child, but they really have nobody that has parental responsibility for them until the point at which they are identified - if they are identified

H

A correctly. In which case, it's the local authority's duty to then take responsibility for them.

B **Lynda Gibbs:** And do they ever come to the attention of the local authority?

C **Laura Duran:** Well, they might come to the attention of the authorities in general if for example the police have an operation in which they raid a premise because there is a suspicion that cannabis is being cultivated there.

D So we see this often happening; that they might find people inside the property and sometimes they might be identified as someone who is vulnerable and most likely in exploitation, particularly if they are children. But sometimes they are not, and they might just go through the criminal justice system as offenders.

E **Lynda Gibbs:** Now ECPAT's made a film called *The Secret Gardeners* which deals specifically with this issue, what was the aim of that film?

F **Laura Duran:** Well we really wanted to be able to showcase the plight of Vietnamese children who are trafficked for cannabis cultivation, particularly as we just keep seeing over and over again these children being prosecuted for those offences of properly identified and supported as child victims of trafficking.

G **Lynda Gibbs:** Can you give me a little bit of an idea of the scale of the problem?

H **Laura Duran:** Not really, because if children are not identified they won't be referred into the National Referral Mechanism (NRM). So already we have a problem because of lack of identification.

Of those who are referred into the National Referral Mechanism as potential victims of trafficking, in 2016 we had about 1278 children. Then we had a sharp increase in referrals in last year's statistics in 2017, so the amount of children referred in that year was about 2120, which I suspect has to do with professional

A awareness around the indicators of trafficking and really understanding what that constitutes.

B **Lynda Gibbs:** Now you mentioned the National Referral Mechanism - can you just tell me what that is?

C **Laura Duran:** Sure, the National Referral Mechanism was put into force as a way of implementing the Council of Europe Convention on Trafficking, which we are signatories to.

D That system of identification sits within two government bodies which are known as *competent authorities*. One of them is a specialist unit within the home office, and the other one sits under the National Crime Agency (NCA) and is called the *Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Unit*.

E As part of the process they issue two decisions to determine whether the government accepts somebody as a victim of trafficking or not.

F The first stage of the decision is a reasonable grounds decision, which has a very low threshold; the threshold is "I suspect but I cannot prove", and that decision should be issued within five days of the first-responder referring a potential victim of trafficking into the National Referral Mechanism.

G The second decision then comes within 45 days - but often the timeframes are not really kept to - and that decision has a little bit of a higher threshold which is "on the balance of probabilities", but still much lower than the criminal threshold of "beyond a reasonable doubt".

H **END**

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