

Cross-border paedophile
activity and the trafficking of
children for sexual purposes

The hallmark activity of The Michael Sieff Foundation is to bring together people who would not otherwise meet in a context that enables them to talk about matters they might otherwise avoid. In the 15 years since it was founded by Elizabeth Haslam and her late husband, Michael Sieff, it has been responsible for a series of conferences that have encouraged multi-agency collaboration. The Foundation is also known for encouraging its conference delegates to make practical recommendations and for broadcasting them where they can do most good. As a result, its work has had a marked effect on UK child protection policy and practice. The conference at Leeds Castle was something of a departure because it marked the Foundation's first attempt to use its expertise in an international context.

This summary includes a digest of the main conference recommendations and provides a sketch of the difficult ground they sprang from. It also seeks to press home some of the resolutions from the World Congress Against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children. Many of the Leeds Castle delegates had been at the 1996 event, and this smaller meeting was an opportunity to review progress.

It is not an exhaustive account, but it tries to give the gist of what was arguably the most fruitful business of the week end—the conversation in the intervals between presentations and over lunch and dinner, when there was a chance to pick over the knot of concerns embedded in the theme. Networking is the main event of many conferences but at Leeds Castle its importance was particularly clear. In an era of open borders and fast travel, trafficking and the sexual exploitation of children are examples of the sinister possibilities of international trade. One does not need to understand much about what is involved to see how transnational crime can prise open small differences in national law, language, culture and history and so blight the hopes of liberal pro-Europeans. Consequently much of the marginal dialogue was about the future of international initiatives in an increasingly difficult political climate: what might yet be possible, what were the likely and necessary limits.

The conditions the conference tried to create—sociable and optimistic by some European standards—were therefore a key aspect of the programme planning and an indication of what The Michael Sieff Foundation hopes may come to characterise its European work: a readiness to talk frankly face-to-face and to struggle with problems of language and meaning, and a determination to arrive at a consensus.

Introduction

The potential of such an approach was very evident, even if it seemed from time to time as if everyone had been called to the edge of a pit and was now peering in with blank amazement. How could so little be known about matters of such glaring multinational, multiracial concern as a commercial traffic in children? How could it be that the information highway, that symbol of cultural transparency, was by one reckoning 70 per cent pornography and regarded as a reliable instrument not of openness or enlightenment but of criminal concealment?

Occasionally there were worse possibilities to contemplate: should it be true, for instance, that there was an international black market in internal organs, might it not be possible—as much was being claimed—that women who had been trapped into prostitution as children were sometimes murdered and eviscerated when their pimps rejected them?

A question like the last may have verged on the histrionic, but it all the same tended to press home the case for better research made by Ann Singleton speaking of the work of Eurostat on the first afternoon. There was such a lack of meaningful statistics on almost every aspect of the many phenomena being discussed, there was hardly a fear or phobia about the larger problem that could be dismissed on the basis of hard evidence. No-one knew of any cases of dismemberment, but who could dare to discount the idea entirely?

There was a similarly unnerving, underworld quality about the insights of Robin Cooper from UK Customs and Excise. He described the behaviour of a suspected paedophile and pornographer on being pursued through airport customs—how he had ducked into a toilet cubicle, broken open the videotape cassettes he was carrying and fixed the spools to his body with sticking-plaster. Another English suspect had built secret rooms and crawling spaces in his house; bedclothes had been found in some of them; no-one knew why.

Europol, Interpol, national police forces and Customs and Excise clearly know a lot about the criminality and curious hoarding behaviour of paedophiles, but rather less about the significance of their behaviour in relation to the greater problems of abuse that afflict vulnerable populations. An illuminating comparison was made with the sociological consequences of earthquakes—how the pimps would set up prostitution rackets in the damage zone often before any more conventional international aid mission arrived.

Such were the glimpses one was given into a parallel universe. The bigger question left hanging was to what extent it may be possible to understand a disease by any of its more bizarre symptoms or a catastrophe by its consequences. Something is known of the

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behaviour and characteristics of the 150 or so paedophiles whose movements are tracked by Interpol and Europol, but nothing much about what their existence or even society's preoccupation with them as 'folk-devils' signifies, only that they seem to embody some extraordinary polarities and oppositions in European society and culture.

So the conference was presented for example with a spectre, since greatly accentuated by another Balkan war, of vulnerable populations, of a mass of people displaced and impoverished socially and economically by conflict. Then it had to deal with the description of the desperate behaviour of an ageing disc jockey in Prague or of a schoolteacher in Stavanger using the grey impersonality of the Internet as a market place for digitised pornography. And between the two, difficult to reconcile with either manifestation, there was the distressing argument that every picture, no matter how low-grade, (there is little agreement in the European Union about what is to be considered pornographic) must be evidence of a misuse or abuse of children and indicate degenerating attitudes among Western societies to childhood itself.

Or on one side of another cultural divide there was the Internet technology itself—home computer, flat-pack work-station and modem—together signifying an immobile, artificial engagement with the world, and on the other the subsistence economies of North Africa where boys are propelled by wild hopes of Western affluence into physical encounters in mainland Europe with men whose appetites are not to be satisfied by Microsoft. To which one must add Najat Mjid's telling reminder that Europe should beware of imposing occidental definitions of prostitution or sexual abuse on Muslim culture, just as it should not assume it provided the customers for either trade. Most come to Morocco from the East.

It is a natural enough reaction to the insights the conference was given into the worse appetites of the adult psyche to want at all costs to put the child first in all strategic thinking and to respect the rights of the child in every culture and circumstance. As much became the underlying sentiment of the gathering. Raymond Kendal from Interpol suggested, for example, that many of the legalistic snares that served to protect abusers might be escaped if child maltreatment were to be made a crime against humanity. And so they might, but at a practical level, declarations concerning inalienable rights may count for too little unless there can be simple Europe-wide agreement about when childhood ends and adulthood begins.

Psychologist and independent consultant developing child protection services in the Basque country.

With Janet Newman, pioneer of the National Missing Persons Helpline, a UK registered charity to support families left behind when someone has gone missing.

Detective Constable in the Paedophilia Unit of the Organised Crime Group at New Scotland Yard. MARIA BALLASTEROS Technical assistant to the police judiciary in Madrid, where she heads a group of information analysts concerned with violence and abuse against women and young people.

Member of the European Parliament representing Dublin and special mediator for abducted children.

Consultant Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist and Director of the London Child and Family Consultation Service.

Consultant to the London Child and Family Consultation Service; co founder with Arnon Bentovim of the Sexual Abuse Assessment and Treatment Programme at Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital.

Teacher of psychology at the University of Bologna, specialising in judicial psychology relating to violence and sexual abuse.

deputised for MP. Paul Boateng was appointed Minister of State for Home Affairs in October 1998.

Commissioner of Belgium to the UN Commission on the Status of Women.

Deputy Director General in the Royal Ministry of Children and Family Affairs in Oslo, where he is head of a section dealing with child protection/child welfare, prevention and parent support policy.

Programme Officer for the Oak Foundation in Geneva concentrating on issues of child abuse.

Assistant Co-ordinator at Europol in The Hague.

Head of social and environmental policy at HM Customs and Excise.

Detective Inspector at Gloucester Constabulary supporting the Chief Constable, Tony Butler, who represents the UK Association of Chief Police Officers on child protection concerns.

Swedish member of the Cabinet of the European Commission with responsibility for judicial co-operation, external economic relations, the internal market, energy, taxes, the environment and developmental assistance.

Social worker and social work trainer presently engaged with STOP, the European programme against paedophilia.

Chairman of The Michael Sieff Foundation.

Founder of The Michael Sieff Foundation.

Chairman of the UNA Women's Advisory Council and a Member of the Boards of the European Women's Lobby and the International Council of Women.

Chief Executive of ChildLine, a national telephone helpline for children in trouble or danger in the United Kingdom.

Consultant to UNICEF, on secondment to the European Commission's DAPHNE Initiative; media co-ordinator for the First World Congress Against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Stockholm.

Chief Executive of Barnardos, the largest independent child welfare NGO in Ireland.

Co-director of the Dartington Social Research Unit.

Clinical psychologist and child and adolescent psychotherapist specialising in work with children in acute crisis and suffering from trauma.

Chief of the Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section of the Criminal Division, US Department of Justice.

Specialised officer within the Trafficking in Human Beings branch in Interpol.

President of Association Bayti, an NGO based in Casablanca, Morocco, a non profit organisation which aids children in difficult circumstances.

With Mary Asprey, pioneer of the National Missing Persons Helpline.

Author of *Prostitution, Power and Freedom* and a background paper for the 1996 Stockholm Congress called *The Sex Exploiter*.

Professor of Social Psychology at the University of the Basque Country and a researcher in the field of child abuse and neglect.

Co-ordinator of Focal Point on Sexual Exploitation of Children.

Training officer in the Basque police force and an advisor to the Basque government on policy concerning the maltreatment of children.

Covers international relations for the Child Focus Bureau and Design Centre in Brussels, whose mission is to support the investigation of children reported missing or abducted.

Principal administrator with the European Commission - Secretariat General - Task Force on Justice and Home Affairs; since 1997 responsible for managing the DAPHNE Initiative.

Research Fellow at the Centre for the Study of Social Exclusion and Social Justice, School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol, on assignment to Eurostat in Luxembourg.

Senior policy adviser at the Ministry of Justice, Directorate of Law Enforcement dealing mainly with trafficking in human beings and the sexual exploitation of children.

Scientific director of the E Zancan Foundation, Padova; presides over a section of the Italian National Health Council in Rome.

Campaign co-ordinator for ECPAT UK.

Social work consultant who has worked for the United Nations High Commission for Refugees in Hong Kong and Vietnam and with an international NGO in the Philippines.

An independent adviser to voluntary child care organisations, NGOs and UNICEF.

Director of Social Services in Devon, England.

1 Introduction to the Conference

The paedophile of the conference title is a particular type of sex criminal whose psychological disorder drives him fixedly towards prepubertal children. As it was to turn out, much of the conference debate was about sexual exploitation more generally, dealing in varying proportions with four classes of abuser described at the outset by June Kane. There were:

- paedophiles who crossed borders in order to have access to children for sex
- paedophiles who took children across borders in order to have sex with them on a more sustained basis and/or to offer them for sex to other paedophiles
- non-paedophile criminals who trafficked children across borders to supply paedophiles or others as a commercial venture
- criminals who trafficked children across borders for the purpose of exploiting them commercially, for example, as domestic servants and who thus made them vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation.

She was trying to head off a misunderstanding about definitions. The fact that abusers and exploiters could be classified was evidence of how much was known about them; the fact that the classes were frequently confused and that the true paedophile (an individual defined by a certain psychiatric profile) was sometimes mistaken for another type of sex criminal or abuser was an indication of how little was generally understood.

Similar confusions hindered strategies for combating the problem, she said. At the 1996 Vienna Conference on Trafficking in Women, arguments about a lack of knowledge were presented alongside evidence about trafficking in groups of what were referred to only as 'women' but which included many as young as 15. The thornier question provoked by such a situation was left unanswered: what was a child?

Put two uncertainties of definition together and worse complexity resulted. As Julia O'Connell Davidson was later to emphasise, since a child was defined by the United Nations as a person under the age of 18, it was clear that the abusers of prostituted and trafficked 'children' were not all paedophiles. Recognising that children were often integrated into the mainstream prostitution market and that their clients were simply users of prostitutes had considerable implications for how the larger problem of trafficking and exploitation was addressed. It meant considering how best to harmonise laws relating to prostitution as well as to the age of consent in order to protect children. Attitudes towards prostitution as well as to children, sexuality and sexual crime needed to change.

The behaviour of June Kane's four classes of sexual exploiter was brought to the light in turn by Robin Cooper, Hamish McCulloch and Willy Bruggeman. Interpol had issued 'green' alert notices about 150 travelling criminals known to be involved in sexual abuse and/or trafficking. Knowledge about the behaviour of paedophiles—their social isolation coupled with their liking for secret societies and clubs—was based on a series of international surveillance operations mounted in collaboration with Far East governments. Europol concentrated on the connection with the Internet, which was both a channel for pornography and the means of detecting those who broadcast it. The paedophile collected images obsessively and in huge quantities; the Interpol/Europol detective paid similarly close attention to the same data.

Against a background of such detailed criminal intelligence but arguably limited understanding, Ann Singleton's observations on behalf of Eurostat seemed all the more stark. More might be known than some believed, but studies by the European Commission and the International Organisation for Migration nevertheless confirmed only that there was an absence of adequate, comprehensive statistical data on the trafficking of children. Such information as there may be was not being collected, checked, processed or disseminated in a systematic manner, she said. The greatest gap in understanding was the result of unharmonised policy, legislation, recording systems and data collection and the lack of allocated resources within the statistical offices of the European Community. Her second caution the following day, when speakers from the five countries were describing national responses and attitudes to child protection concerns, was blunter still. She had been able to write a list: the conference lacked not only statistics on which to base any recommendations about attitude or strategy, but also common definitions of everything from 'child', 'woman' and 'age of consent', to 'trafficking', 'prostitution', 'organised crime', 'commercial exploitation'—even 'missing'.

An example of the kind of local factor that made common definitions so elusive, whether of a paedophile or a child, emerged from Henk van de Stolpe's description of the recent experience in The Netherlands. There it had until lately been the case that young people between the ages of 12 and 16 had to make an official complaint before any case of sexual maltreatment could be prosecuted. The law was indeed likely to be 'harmonised', but the issue remained: a crime in one country was not necessarily a crime, or the same crime, in another.

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Many offenders appeared to feed on this ambiguity in the law. There were few provisions to deal appropriately with an abuser who was law abiding in his own country but a criminal abroad; or with a trafficker who procured children outside the borders of his own country and traded them in a third place; or with the paedophile pornographer who assembled pictures on the Internet from an unknown location. They were exactly the sort of variable conditions indeed that might appeal to a serial offender excited by concealment and flight.

As Owen Keenan put it: 'Sooner or later national governments are forced to institute regulations of one kind or another towards the achievement of at least minimum standards for their child protection systems. But there seems to be little or no appetite for similar actions at a European level where, as far as I'm aware, national ministers with responsibility for child protection services have never met.'

Europe had sought to deal with similar but different legal and administrative systems through the principle of subsidiarity, he said. In other contexts this had much to recommend it, but it could also be used as a block against attempts to take a transnational approach in addressing the rights and needs of children as citizens of the European Union.

Harmonisation, which was a feature of much of the progress towards European integration, had not carried benefits for children. If even a tenth of the effort devoted to producing a unified monetary policy had been devoted to the social welfare of children, then understanding of how they might be protected might begin to approach a common currency.

Definitions and the lack of information Opportunities and constraints

The lack of harmonised and of therefore convincing statistics means that organisations wanting to tackle the problems of paedophilia, sexual abuse and trafficking face a credibility gap.

It is not possible to make an effective argument for more resources.

The response continues to be a reaction to unforeseeable events, instead of being directed towards the pathology of a known phenomenon.

There is so little information, research is almost bound to produce useful results. For example, it might provide a description of typical cases, a fund of statistics based on common definitions, theoretical work on cause and effect and an evaluation of programmes for victims and offenders.

Even if commercial, market-oriented concerns predominate, a European economy dependent on the free movement of labour will need to know about the effect of movement on children and families.

Recommendations for action

International Organisations

Relevant departments of the European Union (DG-V, DG-XII and Europol included) should establish a standing committee to monitor agreements and differences in definitions concerning children. Priority should be given to the allocation of resources within Eurostat to improve the collection of comparative information that can be used for policy and practice development across the Union and within individual countries, for monitoring how well member states have honoured their Stockholm Congress commitments and for commenting on discernible trends. Since cross-border trafficking and the sexual exploitation of children are indicators of wider instability, they may be among issues given priority, but in time, the investment in a common currency to describe children should

look beyond these narrow concerns. Identifying differences should be seen to be as important as resolving them.

International and independent foundations should be encouraged to support research or good reporting and mapping to chart more accurately how different countries talk about, legislate for and support children. Such an exploration need not be confined to Europe or the European Union. The perspective of the Magreb countries, the former Eastern Bloc and those on the major axes of child movement should be included. A connection between research and journalism might be valuable in this context. Shifting some intellectual attention from fiscal matters to matters concerning children might be viewed as a priority.

Definitions and the lack of information

Recommendations for action

National bodies

The Stockholm Congress required countries to set out a national plan of action to combat the commercial sexual exploitation of children.

Progress has been varied. Sharing of ideas and the encouragement of some common pattern and definition in these plans would be welcome. Given the enthusiasm with which the United Kingdom has pursued the recommendations of Stockholm and given its renewed enthusiasm for international co-operation, it is in an excellent position to convene an annual meeting of policy makers responsible for the production and dissemination of these plans to share ideas and look for common goals.

Each member state of the European Union should have identified a single government department to produce a plan to combat cross-border paedophile activity and trafficking. This department should also be asked to co-ordinate thinking on the collection of statistical information on children across all government departments charged with some aspect of children's protection. Reference should be made to the requirements of Eurostat and its needs in informing Europe-wide policy.

Our own organisations

Everyone who attended the conference, and many reading this account of the proceedings, will be directly engaged in some aspect of children's protection. Routinely asking how ordinary tasks are dealt with in another country will at least raise the prospect of some common language between concerned professionals. The network created by the conference should be maintained and might be viewed by those readers who did not attend as a sounding board. An electronic mailgroup might be established for this purpose.

Each reader of this report is likely to belong to at least one international group concerned with some aspect of children's protection or the prosecution of perpetrators of abuse. Highlighting the hindrance caused by differences in definition and understanding of these issues and bringing to attention any common definitions that emerge over the next decade will help to ensure that ambiguity and misunderstanding are steadily reduced.

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The symbolism and standing of Europe have changed radically since the collapse of the Communist bloc and, in the midst of the continuing Balkans crisis, there is recognition of continuing instability. Previously it may have been possible to regard Europe as an ideal confederation of mutual interest, moving with measured tread towards international citizenship, bringing free passage and free trade—and giving asylum to the occasional fugitive escaping totalitarianism or poverty or both.

The Europe of the Leeds Castle conference had been moulded by more recent events. The Italian delegation spoke of the difficulties and pressures caused by the tide of refugees arriving from Albania (these concerns long preceding the NATO action in Kosovo); there was familiar acknowledgement of a trade in Romanian prostitutes to Italy, Cyprus and Turkey and connections with an 'internal market' that carried exploited women and children from West Africa and Thailand into Western Europe. There were many anecdotes about disappearances of children from reception centres in Spain, Holland, Germany, and from the apparently safe embrace of their escorting 'families'. Just thirty miles or so from the moated quiet of the castle, social services, customs and immigration officials were keeping wary but often uninformed eyes on a steady trickle of unaccompanied and accompanied refugee children crossing the English channel.

There was Najit M'jid's reminder of the narrowness of the European view of trade and morality. There were echoes too of the strain on the polite society at the core of Europe and an inkling of the kind of superstition and prejudice the decay of idealism will generate. As has been observed elsewhere, because the Balkans are part of Europe they can be spoken of in racist clichés which nobody would dare to apply to Africa and Asia. 'We are dealing with an imaginary cartography, which projects on to the real landscape its own shadowy ideological antagonisms.'^{*} In this context the traffic in human beings is a tiny trace on the radar of wider confusion.

^{*}See Slavoj Zizek, 'You May!' pp3-6 London Review of Books, 18 March 1999

Borders and boundaries Opportunities and constraints

Europe is not conceived in the same way by major European institutions, such as the European Union, the Council of Europe or the members of EFTA.

The borders between nations and regions represent different and changing degrees of separation. For example, the Spanish-French border is generally open under the Schengen agreement; the political relationship between Northern Ireland and Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales is being altered without any redefinition of boundaries or borders; there are 15 autonomous regions in Spain.

National and political boundaries do not necessarily accord with variations in culture and custom.

Attitudes to children and childhood and views about the nature of sexuality and sexual crime vary between countries; these differences amount to more than a lack of clear definition.

Differences in cultural attitudes are deepened by cultural stereotyping or simple jealousies.

Concerns about clandestine migration and a traffic in children test the convictions of those who view Europe primarily as a market and those who would see it as a federation built on common citizens' rights.

The existence of transnational organisations such as Interpol and Europol means there is scope for Europe-wide action outside the political framework.

The work of the International Labour Organisation, which has well developed policies in relation to the employment of children, makes possible an approach to the victimisation of children not complicated by vexed legal/moral questions, for example to do with the age of sexual consent.

2 Borders and boundaries Recommendations for action

International Organisations

Considerable, if still insufficient, attention is given to the social consequences of major social upheaval, such as the collapse of the Eastern bloc or the crisis in the Balkans. The mechanisms may not be fully understood, but it is clear that change on such a major scale will always be a precursor to the potential exploitation of children. Social programmes, for instance to support refugees and other displaced people, should routinely consider the likely potential for sexual exploitation of vulnerable children.

Greater attention should be given to increasing public understanding of the root causes of children sometimes putting themselves at risk of sexual exploitation. This could usefully be tied in with programmes to reduce racism across the European Union.

The gathering at Leeds Castle was illuminating but there was a sense that it was inducing those who had seen the light to look into it again. Progress depends on the prime movers and shakers in European policy circles coming to similar conclusions for themselves. It is therefore recommended that The Michael Sieff Foundation be asked to convene a similar meeting aimed at makers of children's policy at the highest levels in European national governments. The focus should be similar, with some clear questions posed to participants, a requirement for them to arrive at concrete recommendations and some expectation that they will reconvene to see whether progress has been made.

National bodies

Each member state of the European Union has a range of policies to deal with border issues. Few of these routinely deal with questions of child exploitation. It is recommended that member states introduce mechanisms (possibly incorporating a person who has oversight of all children's issues) to ensure that questions about child exploitation and the movement of abusers are regularly reviewed as part of legislative and policy development.

This may be achieved by an attempt to identify the most risky populations in each member state and to match these with effective programmes to support these groups. Unaccompanied children, accompanied children who have no papers or who lack the ability to confirm their status, young people looking for work or education opportunity—all these groups deserve further closer scrutiny and support.

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Against an increasingly unstable social and political backdrop the 'knowledge work' of Europol and Interpol has taken on a rather different significance. The criminologist J.W.E. Sheptycki* reports how in the post-Cold War years leading up to 1996 the number of legal attachés working at the US Embassy in Moscow rose from 20 to 200 to cope with the increased volume of organised crime in the market place; in the case of Russia that market place embraced contract murder, prostitution, drug trafficking and protection rackets.

Similarly, when the United Kingdom's second house of parliament debated the remit of Europol in 1995, the list of transnational crimes requiring a transnational response included drug trafficking, crime connected with trafficking in nuclear and radioactive substances, illegal immigrant smuggling and money laundering. Eight decades ago when Interpol was created the target was likely to be a professional hotel thief, by now the stuff of film nostalgia; today it is more likely to be the confederates of the Belgian sex criminal Dutroux. While more stable European societies adjust to this rapidly changing scene, there is a danger that the preoccupation with the paedophile whose persona and behaviour are so much in tune with the queasy state of Europe and the general direction of transnational policing may tend to obscure the issues that child care and social welfare policy specialists are better skilled to deal with. The police at Leeds Castle seemed confident that they had the measure of the paedophile as a criminal. One might almost say the paedophile made a satisfactory quarry—part fugitive, part technophile and lacking in any redeeming characteristics. But the real issue—how to protect children from the worst effects of the underlying social malaise that leads to their abuse by a much larger group of non-paedophile abusers—was hardly transnational police work at all. In the same vein, social services in western Europe have been steeped in increasingly sophisticated approaches to child protection issues for a decade and more, but they are insufficiently aware or equipped to intervene to protect children who are exploited or trafficked internationally.

*See J.W.E. Sheptycki, 'Policing, Postmodernism and Transnationalism' *The British Journal of Criminology*, Vol. 38 No. 3, 1998

Other links with other problems Opportunities and constraints

In Morocco, for example, the problem must be seen in the context of the social and economic problems of another culture. Family life is under attack. There is poverty and illiteracy, such that in the Central Atlas the economy of whole villages is based on prostitution.

Sex tourism is economically beneficial to North Africa. In the Far East as much as 10% of some countries' GDP comes from sex tourism.

The reasons for clandestine migration out of North Africa are largely economic.

The return home of the children is an important issue; the children come back much changed.

In Italy the problem of trafficking is lost in the context of wider social problems. There is high immigration; the nation state is trying to respond to belated acknowledgement of paedophilia, sexual abuse, abuse in the family, pornography, sex tourism. Each raises issues to do with communication and response. How is it possible to separate children being trafficked from other refugee children?

3 Other links with other problems Recommendations for action

International Organisations

Organised crime includes sex crime. Much diplomatic and intelligence activity initiated by the European Union and its member states since the fall of the Berlin Wall has concentrated on organised crime. This activity should routinely extend to crimes with a commercial sexual motivation or result.

Europe has made progress on some of the policing aspects of sexual exploitation and trafficking of children. Europol, with its good relationships with Interpol, has drawn together European policing. Something of the sort is needed with regard to social issues for children. At present, the baton is being held by a plethora of social welfare organisations who seldom meet or interact. Expertise therefore exists in small pockets. A European organisation of children's issues may be an extravagant proposal from such a small conference, but something akin to the national children's organisations in member states established in Brussels is not beyond the resource of the EU or even one of the major funding foundations. Such groupings already exist at a European level among voluntary sector organisations; this model might profitably be examined and extended to include others involved in child welfare and protection.

Much good activity within the European Union is restricted to member states. Yet most of the problems encountered at the conference had their genesis outside Europe's borders. More flexible use of Union funds is to be encouraged. The

DAPHNE Initiative is a good example of how important collaborative action can be encouraged at European level.

National bodies

There is much investment in children in most member states of the EU, but little is allowed to move beyond national boundaries, except as a response to issues of extreme deprivation as a result of war or disease. Investing in developing nations to give children reasonable options which then allow them to stay in their own countries (should they wish it) would be likely to reduce costs associated with the support of migrant populations or fruitless detective work by immigration officials.

Our own organisations

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is frequently cited in professional dialogue and there is a growing literature on its usefulness as a tool for effective practice. Revisiting the convention, reviewing levels of compliance and making a commitment to implement its articles in relation to everyday operational questions is recommended.

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For a conference with so sharp a focus on a particular sexual crime, more was said than might have been expected about child abuse matters in general. By current British reckoning at least, trafficking in children for sexual purposes and victimisation by paedophiles are far removed from most child protection social work. While it would be wrong to give the impression that the British have made any special advances in this direction, a series of child abuse scandals in the 1980s and the subsequent judicial inquiries provoked a fairly wide ranging review of family life, of the service response to broadly defined needs and of the proper boundaries of state intervention in private life.

Empirical research of the past five or six years has tended to dispel fears that the sexual abuse of children is epidemic in contemporary Western societies or that the predatory abuser is any more common than he or she was a generation ago. Investigations of rumours concerning organised and/or satanic abuse have remained at the level of unconfirmed suspicions and so-called network abuse within and between certain impoverished extended families, (though it certainly exists and can involve 'solitary' paedophiles in its web), has nevertheless not been considered sufficiently common or worrying to warrant any departure from the wider strategy.

Since then, despite isolated shocks to the child welfare systems in Europe, the case of Dutroux being the most notorious example, and the belated exposure of old institutional abuse scandals, child protection policy in the UK seems to be moving reasonably determinedly into the area of more general family support.

To continue to take Britain as an example, policy makers are left with something of a dilemma: prudence suggests that children's services providers must remain sensitive to the possibility that paedophilia and other crimes against children are a more extensive and sinister threat than the evidence would indicate, while child protection strategies must continue to develop on a foundation of sound evidence to ensure their continuing relevance and value.

The picture the conference painted of the experience elsewhere in Europe was rather different. Chiara Berti remarked on the tendency in Italy to confuse a constellation of phenomena including paedophilia, sex tourism and abuse in the family environment and described the attempt in her country to produce helpful typologies to indicate the differences. Child protection is a relatively new concern in Spain where the liberty that followed Franco's death has seeped quite slowly into the systems created from scratch to meet children's needs

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and protect their rights. In Morocco, social work has no status and there is no youth justice system.

This is not to draw a more or less favourable comparison between national strategies but to suggest why an international discussion tends to drift from the particular to the more general—from a very specific determination to prevent sexual abuse and trafficking to a rather vaguer humane concern for the rights of the child. It helps to explain why international agreement is so difficult, not only for want of definitions or information but because similar circumstantial factors tend to combine in differing proportions in different countries depending on the combination of evidence, legal and moral concerns, consumer pressures and political pragmatism, not to mention the changing flavour of domestic politics.

What the international community most requires, therefore, may be a declaration of concern for local and national differences in relation to the problems they face. They need statistics but also to understand how risk and protective factors operate in the local social fabric. As he passes through the Netherlands, Spain, England—possibly to his perverse delight—the sex criminal will become a different creature in each country in turn, depending on the societal background he moves against. In England the recent experience was that as much as he was a threat to children's safety he was a dangerous distraction; those who wished to change child care policy for the better may have to hold their nerve wherever they see his shadow pass.

Links with existing services Opportunities and constraints

The problems associated with trafficking or sexual abuse require effective, integrated, complementary action on a variety of fronts.

Effective transnational action must incorporate measures to address the complexities of inter-agency collaboration which may be compounded by differences of legislation, jurisdiction, politics and culture.

The requirement is for agencies and state departments to work together in a variety of capacities, eg to prosecute perpetrators, support the victims, treat the perpetrator and to protect the rights of children.

There is the potential for much improvement in circumstances, such that each advance is more likely to save resources as well as to improve the quality of life for children.

Raising the quality of networking so that member states or agencies become at least as sophisticated as the international sex criminal will have benefits in other areas of transnational co-operation.

Perpetrators have a single preoccupation: the agency response can address several social care concerns and in the process establish clear networks with a common purpose, for example in relation to labour, adoption and trafficking issues.

The same technology that is contributing to the problem can be used to provide a solution.

4 Links with existing services Recommendations for action

International Organisations

The training of professionals who work with children moving across international boundaries is currently confined to national bodies. Yet the ideas, practices and requirements are often the same. There could be more opportunities for international training, especially around models of good practice. At present, law enforcement officers seem best placed to benefit from joint training, but the opportunity could also be extended to immigration officials and later to experts in the social and psychological field.

Where does one look for expertise on children's issues within the European Union? Several Director Generals have some responsibility, with DG-V and DG-XII having the most. Much of what is said above demands some co-ordinating function, a requirement not only for the extreme cases discussed at the conference but also for all children living in the European Union and beyond its immediate borders.

International and national organisations should consider how the use of resources for co-ordination and dissemination might be improved eg through the development of the many Web sites that exist and the support of specialised documentation centres.

National bodies

There were familiar calls at the conference for an ombudsman to work on behalf of children in all member states (and, on the back of this recommendation the possibility of instituting a European Ombudsman). It was clear from a meeting of people who deal constantly with children whose problems fall between the concerns of several government departments that some form of co-ordinating activity is needed. Where ombudsmen exist (or there are campaigns to introduce them) issues raised at the conference should be brought to their attention.

Our own organisations

All conference participants and readers of this report will have a network of people to whom they turn for advice. It is the crossing of networks and the exploitation of opportunities that gives those who exploit children an advantage. All could learn more by looking beyond the worlds we ordinarily inhabit and incorporating new groups into the struggle to protect vulnerable children more effectively.

Information-sharing must go beyond the transactions that occur at isolated events and become an instinct we all nurture.

Afterword

The Michael Sieff Foundation will use all its influence to encourage others to act on these recommendations and to provide a channel for those looking to build on the small network of concern already focused on the troubling issues discussed here. The Conference participants are key contributors to that effort and they will be urged to report on their progress. With the responsibility to draw wide attention to the problems that have been described must go a proper sense of caution. No good will come from stirring up another moral panic: one of the messages to have emerged from the revolution in attitudes to child protection is that keen sensitivity to a problem does not necessarily generate a remedy. Similarly, in the case of youth justice, for want of better understanding, the tide of concern has the habit of turning uncertainly with every decade, veering first towards the needs of the victim and then towards greater concern to treat the offender.

This account has been written, by the broadest definition, for the European policy maker—for the Commissioners, MEPs and officers on the inside, for the constructive critic on the outside and for politicians in those countries preparing for entry. It does not provide a rallying call for a crusade. It sets out a few fairly gentle reminders about the moral complexities of international development and calls for more solid understanding, better preparation and for a perspective that goes beyond immediate concerns. As such, it is unlikely to appeal to the pragmatist faced with today's political crisis but it may give food for thought to those who must try to anticipate tomorrow's social problems.