



DEBATE PACK

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Gang associated girls

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Summary

A Westminster Hall debate on gang associated girls is scheduled for Tuesday 6 October 2020 at 9.30am. The Member leading the debate is Florence Eshalomi MP.

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The House of Commons Library prepares a briefing in hard copy and/or online for most non-legislative debates in the Chamber and Westminster Hall other than half-hour debates. Debate Packs are produced quickly after the announcement of parliamentary business. They are intended to provide a summary or overview of the issue being debated and identify relevant briefings and useful documents, including press and parliamentary material. More detailed briefing can be prepared for Members on request to the Library.

1. Background

There is no reliable information about the number of girls associated with gangs. According to some data the number of young women involved in gangs appears is small. For example, as at 2 July 2020 0.2% of individuals on the Metropolitan Police Service's Gangs Matrix were females (six were listed on the Matrix).¹ However, estimates vary. The Children's Commissioner estimated in February 2019 that around 2,290 girls were associated with gangs in England (34% of all gang associated children).²

1.1 County lines drug dealing

County Lines drug dealing involves drugs gangs in big cities expanding their operations to smaller towns. These drug gangs often use children and vulnerable adults to transport and deal drugs. Senior members of the gang coordinate its activities using mobile phones.

The National Crime Agency identified "more than 3,000 unique deal line numbers...in 2019, of which 800 to 1,100 lines [were] estimated to be active during a given month".³

How many women and girls are involved in county lines?

The National Crime Agency estimated in January 2019 that 91% of those associated with county lines were men. However, the NCA believe that "females may be underrepresented as both offenders and victims of exploitation".⁴

In September 2020 London's 'Rescue and Response County Lines Project' reported that it has received 192 referrals for young women since it began in 2018. This amounts to 17% of all referrals to the project. The project suggests that an increase in referrals for young women over the past two years demonstrates "increased awareness as opposed to increased activity."⁵ The project found that

Gender bias continues to be reported, however the perception that young women are only working on county lines in low key roles is now starting to be challenged, with professionals reporting that young women are increasingly working in the same roles as young men, including holding their own lines.⁶

The Children's Society published a [report on the criminal exploitation of children](#) in July 2019. The report acknowledges that the "true scale of

¹ MPS, MPS Gang Violence Matrix (GVM) Quarterly Figures. [A summary of the latest data relating to the MPS Gang Violence Matrix as of 02/07/2020](#), 2 July 2020

² Children's Commissioner, [The character of gang associated children and young people](#), February 2019

³ NCA, [National Strategic Assessment of Serious and Organised Crime 2020](#), para 94

⁴ Ibid, para 6

⁵ Rescue and Response County Lines Project, [Year 2 Strategic Assessment](#), September 2020, p6

⁶ Rescue and Response County Lines Project, [Year 2 Strategic Assessment](#), September 2020, p6

children and young people being abused (by county lines drugs gangs) and exploited is difficult to determine and remains a clear intelligence gap". The Children's Commissioner estimate suggests that between 30,000 and 50,000 young people could be affected by county lines.⁷ The report notes that "girls are often lost in the narrative around child criminal exploitation".⁸ The report notes that "all professionals reported that it was predominantly males that they were seeing. However, in all areas participants talked about females and girls in relation to criminal exploitation and county lines activity".⁹

Sexual exploitation

County Lines offenders use sexual exploitation to recruit vulnerable females to their gangs. Male gang members groom vulnerable women through sexual relationships. The NCA says that women "may not acknowledge they are victims due to the nature of the grooming by offenders, i.e. they believe they are in a relationship with them".¹⁰

Sexual violence is used to control those exploited as part of county lines offending. As detailed by the NCA:¹¹

- A minority of female victims may also be sexual exploited for financial gain.
- County lines offenders may "offer" children and females to other offenders for sexual activity.
- County Line offenders 'cuckoo' properties (sometimes the properties of sex workers) to use as part of the county line organisations. Sometimes females are encouraged to take drugs at these properties and subsequently held in "debt bondage by offenders" and "sexually exploited... as a form of 'payment'".

London's 'Rescue and Response County Lines Project' has identified that women face particular challenges in county lines:¹²

- Factor 1: Young women carry an emotional burden for the group and its members; often being relied upon for emotional support and counsel.
- Factor 2: Young women tend to suffer more sexual exploitation and abuse than young men.
- Factor 3: Young women in a relationship with an exploiter face an additional emotional obstacle in escaping the relationship as well as the exploitation.

⁷ The Children's Society, [Counting lives: Responding to children who are criminally exploited](#), July 2019, p16

⁸ Ibid, page 30

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ NCA, [County lines drug supply, vulnerability and harm 2019](#), January 2019, para 34

¹¹ Ibid, paras 38 to 44

¹² Rescue and Response County Lines Project, [Year 2 Strategic Assessment](#), September 2020, p22

1.2 Action

The Government says it is targeting funding to support women and girls affected by gang activity:

The Government provides a range of support for county lines victims including: funding Young People's Advocates in Birmingham, Manchester and London to work directly with gang-affected women and girls, especially if they have been victims, or are at risk, of sexual violence by gangs including county lines; funding through the Trusted Relationships fund of £13 million to help foster relationships between frontline professionals and young people at risk of sexual exploitation including exploitation through county lines; and the £22m Early Intervention Youth Fund is funding 10 projects which will specifically address those at risk of involvement in county lines and criminal exploitation.¹³

Several third sector organisations provide advocacy and support services to women and girls affected by gangs. One such organisation is [Abianda](#) which provides services in London. They provide a twelve-session group work programme for women and girls which helps them

develop the knowledge and skills they need to better navigate the risks they face in their lives, and a peer support network. They also gain work and life skills so they can make their own efforts to raise awareness about how young women are affected by gangs and what needs to be done to prevent it.¹⁴

Tackling county lines

Tackling county lines drugs dealing was a key strand of the previous Conservative Government's [Serious Violence Strategy](#). They invested £3.6 million in the NCA to open the [National County Lines Coordination Centre](#) in September 2018. The centre brings together the NCA, regional organised crime units and local forces to coordinate law enforcement activities against county lines. A large amount of its work is in gathering, combining and analysing intelligence on county lines. It also coordinates 'intensification weeks' of enforcement and provides training and support to local forces responding to county lines.

Police forces have also been working to join up their activity on county lines. Forces where county lines gangs are exporting from (normally large metropolitan forces) have sometimes supported enforcement activities in neighbouring 'county forces' where the drugs are being sold.

Coordination between local, regional and national law enforcement against county lines can be difficult. For example, The National County Lines Coordination Centre has developed a 'collection matrix' to build a national picture of county lines offending. This matrix is manually put together by staff in the centre from spreadsheets emailed to them from local forces. The centre must collect intelligence manually in this way because the police do not yet have (in the words of HMICFRS) "a

¹³ [PQ 27058, Drugs: Organised Crime](#), answered on 17 March 2020

¹⁴ [Abianda, Services, training and professional development](#), 2018, p5

sufficiently integrated and automated system for managing intelligence on cross- border criminal activities".¹⁵

In January 2020 HMICFRS published an [inspection of law enforcements response to county lines](#). Whilst the Inspectorate praised the improved response to the issue, they highlighted that the...

...challenges faced by police forces when they try to work together on county lines are symptoms of a bigger problem. This is the 43-force structure of policing in England and Wales, and whether it is fit for purpose in the 21st century.¹⁶

1.3 Calls for further action

Florence Eshalomi MP has called for more action to help women and girls affected by gangs in London. In February 2020 she published a [report on the issue](#) in her capacity as a London Assembly Member. She made four key recommendations to the Mayor of London:¹⁷

- More evidence should be collected about women and girls involved in gangs.
- Police officers should be trained to identify women and girls involved in gangs. This training should be developed in partnership with specialist organisations.
- More funding should be made available so that gender-specific services can be provided to women and girls affected by gangs.
- More funding should be made available for early intervention projects which support girls and young women "in understanding and building healthy relationship".

Similar themes have been identified by London's 'Rescue and Response County Lines Project'. They said, "awareness needs to be raised... about the use of young women in county lines". They also called for authorities to consider criminal as well as sexual exploitation of women in county lines gangs.¹⁸

¹⁵ HMICFRS, [Both sides of the coin The police and National Crime Agency's response to vulnerable people in 'county lines' drug offending](#), January 2020, p11

¹⁶ HMICFRS, [Both sides of the coin The police and National Crime Agency's response to vulnerable people in 'county lines' drug offending](#), January 2020, p19

¹⁷ Florence Eshalomi AM, [Gang Associated Girls: Supporting young women at risk](#), February 2020

¹⁸ Rescue and Response County Lines Project, [Year 2 Strategic Assessment](#), September 2020, p6

2. Further reading

2.1 News

Evening Standard, [‘Gangs luring girls into county lines drug dealing because they are less likely to be stopped by police’](#) 22 July 2020

The Guardian, [‘Thousands of girl gang members are trapped in a cycle of violence and abuse’](#) 27 November 2019

BBC News, [‘Lost on the line: The county lines gangs recruiting girls’](#) 28 October 2019

BBC News [‘County lines: Girls under the radar drug gangs’](#) 15 October 2019

BBC News [“Girls in gangs ‘failed by authorities’”](#) 25 April 2019

The Independent, [“Sex aged 10, drug dealing and brutal violence: The hidden epidemic of vulnerable girls being exploited by county lines gangs”](#) 16 February 2019

2.2 Parliamentary material

Parliamentary questions

[Gangs: Young People](#) 30 Sep 2020 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 95652

Asked by: Fletcher, Colleen | **Party:** Labour Party

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Education on the steps schools can take to reduce the number of young people joining gangs.

Answering member: Kit Malthouse | **Party:** Conservative Party | **Department:** Home Office

The Government’s Manifesto set out ambitious reforms to tackle crime, including gang activity, serious violence, and county lines. The Prime Minister and Home Secretary are driving a united government response with a new cross-Whitehall Crime and Justice Task Force to ensure we use every lever at our disposal to fight crime, with clear commitments and Ministerial representation from the Department for Education.

In addition:

Relationships, Sex and Health Education will become compulsory from September. Schools can build on the core content to address local issues such as gang activity and recognising and avoiding exploitative relationships.

DfE are implementing the recommendations from the Children in Need review so that vulnerable children are seen, and their needs are recognised. At the PM’s Hidden Harms Summit (May 2020), DfE announced nearly £10m for the What Works for Children’s Social Care to test a range of interventions to improve the outcomes for children in need, including £6.5 million to expand and further test embedding social workers in more than 150 schools in 21 local authorities.

Schools, AP and colleges are also working closely with Violence Reduction Units around the country to prevent involvement in serious violence and gang activity.

[Drugs: Organised Crime](#) 29 Sep 2020 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 93579

Asked by: Mearns, Ian | **Party:** Labour Party

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the Answer of 10 June 2020 to Question 53408 on Drugs: Organised Crime, what work is currently being undertaken by her Department in collaboration with (a) the Department for Health and Social Care, (b) the Ministry of Justice, (c) the Department for Education and (d) local authorities to tackle county lines drug trafficking and safeguard vulnerable children from exploitation.

Answering member: Victoria Atkins | **Party:** Conservative Party | **Department:** Home Office

County lines drug trafficking is a growing threat and one that this Government is determined to tackle. A cross-government approach is essential to identify and support children and young people who are criminally exploited by these ruthless gangs.

We are working across government to enhance the response to children and young people who are subject to criminal exploitation from county lines. Through our county lines programme, the Home Office is investing £860,000 this financial year to provide specialist one-to-one support for children and young people who at risk or involved in county lines. We are also working in collaboration with other government departments to monitor and respond to the impact of COVID-19 on county lines activity and exploitation.

We are also committed to taking forward national learning and are working with the Department for Education, the Ministry of Justice and the Department for Health and Social Care to examine the recommendations from the National Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel's report 'It was Hard to Escape', as well as those from other safeguarding reviews relating to child criminal exploitation, in order to identify areas for improvement, put in place support for vulnerable children, raise awareness of criminal exploitation from county lines and ensure that the criminal justice response to county lines is as effective and robust as possible.

[Crime Prevention: Crimes of Violence](#) 05 Aug 2020 | Written questions | Answered | House of Lords | HL7131

Asked by: Lord Farmer | **Party:** Conservative Party

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the success of Violence Reduction Units in preventing gang and knife crime committed by those from families where there is little or no father involvement.

Answering member: Baroness Williams of Trafford | **Party:** Conservative Party | **Department:** Home Office

This government is investing £70m over two years to support the development of Violence Reduction Units. Some VRUs have commissioned targeted initiatives aimed at parents and families which strengthen family-based decision-making, provide counselling support and support those with incarcerated parents. The impact of VRUs' work will take time to be seen, and evidence

from the Glasgow VRU suggests that the effect will be gradual and will accumulate over time.

The Home Office has commissioned an independent process evaluation of VRUs during 2019/20 which will be published later this summer. Evaluation of VRUs during 2020/21 will include both process and impact elements allowing us to investigate how and why any initial impact is occurring. The Youth Violence Commission has welcomed the Government's commitment to VRUs and the package of challenge and support we have put in place for their success.

Whilst an assessment has not been made of the role of family hubs in preventing knife crime, this government has invested £1.085bn through the Troubled Families programme. The programme, which is delivered by local authorities and their partners, is driving public services to work together to provide effective, coordinated support to our most disadvantaged families. The risk of serious violence is one of the recently added criterion for suitability for the programme.

Similarly, this government has made early intervention and prevention a priority, investing £200 million in initiatives to support young people at risk of exploitation and involvement in serious violence, through the Youth Endowment Fund. We are also investing £500 million through the new DCMS Youth Investment Fund over five years, helping to build 60 new youth centres across the country, refurbish around 360 existing youth facilities, and provide over 100 mobile facilities for harder to reach areas. The YIF will also support the provision and coordination of high-quality services for young people, and an investment in the youth workforce.

[Pupil Exclusions](#) 19 May 2020 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 45342

Asked by: Siddiq, Tulip | **Party:** Labour Party

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps his Department is taking to prevent children who were excluded from school just before school closures in March 2020 being exploited by criminals.

Answering member: Vicky Ford | **Party:** Conservative Party |
Department: Department for Education

As both my right hon. Friends, the Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer have made clear, the government will do whatever it takes to support people affected by COVID-19.

Our latest guidance is set out below:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-schools-and-other-educational-settings>.

This includes specific guidance for education settings (including alternative provision settings) and local authorities about children supported through social care, with education, health and care plans or identified as vulnerable by their school or local authority and who are therefore in need of continued education provision.

In addition, the Home Office is working closely with other government departments to allocate a proportion of the £750 million funding for charities announced by my right hon. Friend, the Chancellor of the Exchequer last month. This includes a total of £34.15 million in emergency support for charities helping

vulnerable children who have been impacted by the COVID-19 outbreak (this includes funds distributed by the Home Office and the Department for Education).

The Home Office has invested £70 million into Violence Reduction Units (VRUs) to help tackle serious violence in the 18 worst affected areas. VRUs are non-statutory partnerships which offer leadership and strategic coordination of the local response to serious violence by bringing together police, local government, health and education professionals, community leaders and other key partners to identify the drivers of serious violence and agree a multi-agency response to them. Across VRUs there are a total of 26 educational interventions planned for the 2020/21 financial year, however, due to COVID-19 VRUs instead have mobilised new virtual interventions to ensure activity is still underway despite school closures and social distancing.

In response to COVID-19, on 6 May the Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) launched a £6.5 million fund to support vulnerable young people at risk of youth violence, particularly through finding the best ways to reach and support them under the current social distancing guidelines. The objective of the YEF is to prevent children and young people at the highest risk of involvement in serious violence, from becoming involved in crime and violence, including reoffending.

The £13 million Trusted Relationships Fund (2018 – 2022) funds 11 different local authorities across England delivering innovative approaches to supporting children and young people aged 10 to 17 at risk of child sexual exploitation or abuse, criminal exploitation and peer on peer abuse. Restrictions associated with the response to COVID-19 have meant that local authorities have had to adapt their projects, introducing phone or video-based mentoring sessions, online support and group based social activities.

The Department for Education is also funding a £2 million Tackling Child Exploitation support programme to help safeguarding partners in local areas develop an effective response to extra-familial harms such as child sexual and child criminal exploitation. The programme has facilitated some interactive online discussions recently to explore the implications of COVID-19 on young people facing exploitation and external threats.

This government is also investing £20 million this year to crack down on the county lines gangs who are exploiting our children and having a devastating impact on our communities. This includes investment to significantly uplift the law enforcement response to county lines, develop several wider national capabilities and increase specialist support for young people and their families who are affected by county lines exploitation.

These are rapidly developing circumstances; we continue to keep the situation under review and will keep Parliament updated accordingly.

[Drugs: Organised Crime](#) 17 Mar 2020 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 27058

Asked by: Ribeiro-Addy, Bell | **Party:** Labour Party

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps the Government plans to take to tackle sexual exploitation occurring as a result of county lines activity.

Answering member: Victoria Atkins | **Party:** Conservative Party |
Department: Home Office

The Government recognises the devastating impact of county lines activity on children and vulnerable people which can include both sexual and criminal exploitation.

We are determined to disrupt these ruthless gangs and put an end to the exploitation associated with county lines. The Home Office has announced £25m of targeted investment over this year and next to uplift the law enforcement response to this exploitative model of drugs supply and to increase specialist support to children, young people and their families who are affected.

This is in addition to providing £3.6m to establish the new National County Lines Coordination Centre (NCLCC) in September 2018, which has significantly enhanced our cross-border intelligence and activity on county lines to better safeguard and protect victims of county lines. Work is ongoing to protect the exploited and target the offenders, and in four separate weeks of law enforcement intensification over 2,500 arrests have been made and over 3,000 vulnerable individuals have been engaged for safeguarding.

The Government provides a range of support for county lines victims including: funding Young People's Advocates in Birmingham, Manchester and London to work directly with gang-affected women and girls, especially if they have been victims, or are at risk, of sexual violence by gangs including county lines; funding through the Trusted Relationships fund of £13 million to help foster relationships between frontline professionals and young people at risk of sexual exploitation including exploitation through county lines; and the £22m Early Intervention Youth Fund is funding 10 projects which will specifically address those at risk of involvement in county lines and criminal exploitation.

[Crime: Drugs](#) 25 Feb 2020 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 15073

Asked by: Rimmer, Ms Marie | **Party:** Labour Party

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps her Department is taking to prevent the exploitation by county lines drug gangs of looked-after children placed out-of-borough.

Answering member: Victoria Atkins | **Party:** Conservative Party |
Department: Home Office

County lines have a devastating impact on our communities, and we are determined to crack down on these gangs and put an end to the exploitation of vulnerable children.

The National County Lines Co-ordination Centre (NCLCC), established with £3.6m of Home Office funding, has been vital to strengthening our response to this issue by enhancing the intelligence picture and enabling police forces to work together to tackle this complex, cross border threat. Since it became operational in September 2018 the NCLCC has coordinated four weeks of intensive law enforcement action resulting in over 2,500 arrests and over 3,000 individuals engaged for safeguarding.

The Home Office has also announced £25m of targeted investment across 2019/20 and 2020/21 to uplift the law

enforcement response to county lines and increase the support available to children, young people and families that are affected.

In addition, the Government provides a range of support for county lines victims including: funding Young People's Advocates in Birmingham, Manchester and London to provide help and support for young people exploited through county lines, and funding through the £13m Trusted Relationships fund to help foster relationships between frontline professionals and young people at risk of exploitation including county lines.

The needs of the child are paramount when deciding the right care placement and Local Authorities have a statutory duty to ensure that there is sufficient provision for their looked after children.

Lack of sufficient placements to meet young people's needs can lead to children being placed out of area. The Government is helping to improve commissioning of placements, including providing funding through the Department for Education's £200 million children's social care Innovation Programme.

[Crime: Drugs](#) 12 Feb 2020 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 12265

Asked by: Shannon, Jim | **Party:** Democratic Unionist Party

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent estimate her Department has made of the number of children and young people exploited by county lines drug dealing networks.

Answering member: Kit Malthouse | **Party:** Conservative Party | **Department:** Home Office

County lines have a devastating impact on communities. We are determined to disrupt these gangs and put an end to the exploitation of children and vulnerable adults.

In October 2019 the Home Secretary announced £20m of targeted investment to support a package of measures to crack down on county lines gangs. This includes:

increasing the capacity of the National County Lines Coordination Centre;

supporting increased operational activity by British Transport Police on rail networks;

exploiting technology and data to support disruption of county lines drug dealers using the road network;

tackling money laundering and increasing cash and drug seizures; and

specialist support to victims and families to help young people exit their involvement.

This investment is already having a direct impact, which is why we recently committed an additional £5m to increase efforts to tackle these ruthless gangs. This brings our overall investment to £25m over 2019/20 and 2020/21.

The Children's Commissioner's report 'Keeping Kids Safe', published in February 2019, estimated that 27,000 children in England identify as a gang member. Children aged between 15-17 make up the majority of the vulnerable people involved in county lines, while both girls and boys are groomed and

exploited, there is likely to be underrepresentation of both females and adults as victims.

[Crime: Drugs](#) 12 Feb 2020 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 12264

Asked by: Shannon, Jim | **Party:** Democratic Unionist Party

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent steps her Department has taken to tackle county lines drugs dealing.

Answering member: Kit Malthouse | **Party:** Conservative Party | **Department:** Home Office

County lines have a devastating impact on communities. We are determined to disrupt these gangs and put an end to the exploitation of children and vulnerable adults.

In October 2019 the Home Secretary announced £20m of targeted investment to support a package of measures to crack down on county lines gangs. This includes:

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The Children's Commissioner's report 'Keeping Kids Safe', published in February 2019, estimated that 27,000 children in England identify as a gang member. Children aged between 15-17 make up the majority of the vulnerable people involved in county lines, while both girls and boys are groomed and exploited, there is likely to be underrepresentation of both females and adults as victims.

[Crime Prevention: Young People](#) 01 Nov 2019 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 5013

Asked by: Baker, Mr Steve | **Party:** Conservative Party

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what steps she is taking to divert young people away from violent crime.

Answering member: Kit Malthouse | **Party:** Conservative Party | **Department:** Home Office

Tackling violent crime is a priority and this Government is determined to crack down on the scourge of violence devastating our communities. The Government is investing £220 million in early intervention projects to steer young people away from getting involved in serious violence and make positive life choices.

The Early Intervention Youth Fund of £22 million is supporting 40 projects endorsed by Police and Crime Commissioners across England and Wales. These projects include work with children and young people at risk of criminal involvement, organisations safeguarding those at risk of gang exploitation and county lines, or who have already offended to help divert them into positive life choices.

The £200 million Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) is a long-term fund to prevent children and young people at the highest risk of involvement in serious violence, from becoming involved in crime and violence, including reoffending. Operating independently of government, the Youth Endowment Fund will robustly test and evaluate every intervention it funds to develop a strong evidence base showing the interventions that are most effective in making a positive difference to the lives of young people. The first successful 22 bids were announced earlier this month.

The anti-knife crime Community Fund has supported 115 projects in local communities to tackle knife crime in 2017/18 and 2018/19. The third year of funding (2019-20) of £1.5m is supporting 61 projects in England and Wales this year.

The Government recognises that local youth services are an important partner in tackling violent crime. On 30 September the Government reiterated a commitment to young people, confirming £500 million investment through the new Youth Investment Fund over five years. This vital investment, the cornerstone of the Government's offer for young people, will help build 60 new youth centres across the country, refurbish around 360 existing youth facilities, and provide over 100 mobile facilities for harder to reach areas. The fund will also support the provision and coordination of high-quality services for young people, and an investment in the youth workforce.

[Exploitation: Children and Young People](#) 04 Oct 2019 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 290916

Asked by: Brown, Lyn | **Party:** Labour Party

To ask the Attorney General, what recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of the Crown Prosecution Service's compliance with legislation and guidance relating to the avoidance of unnecessary prosecution of children and young people who have been groomed, exploited or trafficked as part of county lines criminal activity.

Answering member: Michael Ellis | **Party:** Conservative Party | **Department:** Attorney General

The exploitation, grooming, and trafficking of children and young people is abhorrent. The CPS takes great care to ensure the right people are prosecuted for the right offences in county lines cases, by training prosecutors to have an increased awareness of gang-associated exploitation and to scrutinise the evidence. This builds on clear CPS guidance which recognises the principle of non-prosecution of victims of trafficking or slavery.

Early identification by investigators is essential, in order to avoid the criminalisation of victims. On 1 October 2019, the Home Secretary announced a surge of activity to crack down on county lines drugs gangs. The package of measures, underpinned by £20 million of Home Office investment, will intensify law enforcement efforts to disrupt the county lines model, including the provision

of specialist support to victims and families in order to help children and young people exit their involvement in county lines.

[Drugs: Organised Crime](#) 26 Jun 2019 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 260530

Asked by: Ryan, Joan | **Party:** Change UK - The Independent Group

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent assessment he has made of the number of girls being sexually exploited in the county lines drugs trade.

Answering member: Victoria Atkins | **Party:** Conservative Party | **Department:** Home Office

The latest threat assessment on county lines was published by the National Crime Agency (NCA) in January 2019. This sets out that while criminal exploitation is the most common exploitation type within county lines, victims are sometimes subjected to sexual exploitation and these victims are largely female. The assessment also points out the likelihood that females are underrepresented as both victims and perpetrators of county lines criminality.

Work is ongoing to protect those who are exploited and target county lines offenders. The Home Office has provided £3.6m to establish the National County Lines Coordination Centre (NCLCC) to enhance our cross border intelligence and activity on county lines and to better safeguard and protect victims of county lines. NCLCC has so far carried out three separate weeks of operational intensification leading to over 1600 arrests and over 2100 individuals engaged with for safeguarding.

In addition, the Government provides a range of support for county lines victims including; funding Young People's Advocates in Birmingham, Manchester and London to work directly with gang-affected women and girls, especially if they have been victims, or are at risk, of sexual violence by gangs including county lines; funding through the Trusted Relationships fund of £13 million over two years to help foster relationships between frontline professionals and young people at risk of exploitation including county lines; and we have provided funding through the £22m Early Intervention Youth Fund over two years for six projects which will specifically address those at risk of involvement in county lines and criminal exploitation.

[Gangs and Knives: Crime](#) 24 Jun 2019 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 266245

Asked by: Haigh, Louise | **Party:** Labour Party

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, with reference to the press release of 22 February 2019 entitled £9.8 million fund to confront knife and gang crime culture, how many families in each project area have been assisted by the fund; and what support they have received.

Answering member: Rishi Sunak | **Party:** Conservative Party | **Department:** Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

The Troubled Families Programme is a £920 million programme to help up to 400,000 families with multiple and complex needs, including those at risk of becoming involved in crime and serious violence. The Supporting Families Against Youth Crime Fund has

provided a further £9.8 million to help 21 places further enhance how their local Troubled Families Programme helps tackle youth violence and gangs. Each of the projects are designed to respond directly to the needs of their community and so the support provided to families varies in each local area. They include diversionary activities such as boxing and residential courses, resilience building, out of hours mentors, conflict resolution and whole family counselling. Local areas awarded funding will provide monitoring data later this year.

Other

[Serious youth violence, Sixteenth Report of Session 2017–19](#) 18 July 2019 | House of Commons Home Affairs Committee | House of Commons | HC1016

[Knife Crime](#) 24 January 2019 | House of Commons Debate | House of Commons | cc 214WH to 258WH

[Action following the Independent Review of Drugs](#) 27 Feb 2020 | Written statements | House of Commons | HCWS128

[Crime and Policing](#) 02 Oct 2019 | Written statements | House of Lords | HLWS1809

[The Prime Minister's Serious Youth Violence Summit, 1-4 April 2019](#) 08 Apr 2019 | Written statements | House of Commons | HCWS1497

[Preventing serious violence](#) 01 Apr 2019 | Written statements | House of Commons | HCWS1469

[Youth crime](#) 25 Feb 2019 | Written statements | House of Commons | HCWS1359

2.3 Policy documents

The Health Shop, [Breaking Barriers A report into gang affected females in Nottingham: An evaluation of coercion, consent and potential harm](#), undated

National Youth Agency, [Gangs and Exploitation A youth work response to COVID-19](#) May 2020

Florence Eshalomi AM, [Gang Associated Girls: Supporting young women at risk](#), February 2020

HMICFRS, [Both sides of the coin The police and National Crime Agency's response to vulnerable people in 'county lines' drug offending](#), January 2020

Ministry of Justice [County Line Exploitation practice guidance](#), October 2019

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