



Department of
Justice

An Roinn Dlí agus Cirt

Máinnystrie O tha Laa

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09 October 2024

REFERENCE: FOI\24\107

Dear Sir/Madam,

Thank you for your request for information dated 11/09/24, referring to an email sent to DOJ on 17/09/20 and detailed below.

Sent: 11 September 2024 11:50

To: DOJ FOI Mailbox

Subject: FOI CHILD PROTECTION

Could I ask for a response to these questions under FOI please.

Please supply copies of any internal documents on this subject, redacted where necessary.

Date: Thu, Sep 17, 2020 at 3:10 PM

Subject: Urgent Anti slavery report

To: DOJ Press Office

I note on p42 of this report

- https://www.antislaverycommissioner.co.uk/media/1461/ccs207_ccs0520602790-001_iasc_annual-report-2019-2020_e-laying.pdf

" I visited Northern Ireland again this year with two of my team. I focused my time on meeting victims and visited both Belfast and Lisburn Women's

Aid and Migrant Help. I also attended the Organised Crime Task Force and met with the newly returned Minister for Justice Naomi Long. I was impressed by her commitment to tackling modern slavery in Northern Ireland which had been heightened in the minds of ministers and the community by the connection to the Grays incident where the lorry driver was from Northern Ireland. We discussed the benefits of STROs based on evidence from England, Wales and Scotland, the potential impact of Brexit on trafficking over the border and the interventions that had been developed to address the grooming of children by paramilitaries."

Please could you get me a line today on the extent of grooming by paramilitaries?

- 1) What are they being groomed for?**
- 2) Where is it happening?**
- 3) Which paramilitary groups are involved?**
- 4) How many children have been involved?**

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 gives you two rights of access when you write to us asking for information. You have the right to know whether we hold recorded information falling in scope of your request, and you have the right to receive this recorded information subject to cost limit or exemption.

RESPONSE

We note from our records that a response was provided to you in 2020. In relation to your current request, it is unclear whether you seek information on the anti-slavery report from 2020, the questions below it, both, or other information and it is, therefore, difficult to assess what would be in scope.

The Executive Programme on Paramilitarism and Organised Crime (EPPOC) Programme Team has, therefore, provided the following response related to your request. We hope it is useful in directing to you to a range of sources of information

that the Programme draws upon in relation to the issue of Child Exploitation by paramilitaries, including the grooming of children and may assist in any refined request that you may wish to submit.

There are a number of Government Departments, as well as a range of statutory and voluntary agencies engaged in work to address the issue of Child Exploitation, including both sexual and criminal exploitation. EPPOC is working in partnership with the Department of Justice and others to support this work, and to raise awareness of this complex issue.

An extensive range of reports detailing and documenting the harm caused to people and communities by paramilitary groups can be found on EPPOC's [website](#). This includes thematic and project-based information on the links between poor mental health, trauma and paramilitarism and the extent to which young people are exploited, abused and groomed by proscribed organisations.

Documents you may find particularly helpful include the EPPOC-funded, 'From Contextual to Criminal Harm: Young People's Perceptions and Experience of Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) in Northern Ireland' <https://www.endingtheharm.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Criminal-harms-report-final.pdf>, in which participants provided examples of young people being actively groomed over a prolonged period of time, taking increasingly dangerous risks to undertake more serious forms of crime. The participants described activities such as violence, intimidation, extortion, property damage and the concealment of weapons.

The Safeguarding Board NI's briefing papers on the influence of paramilitarism in Northern Ireland on the recognition of Child Sexual Exploitation may also be of particular relevance. See : [Briefing paper No. 1 - Potential impediments to the recognition of the sexual exploitation of young males under 18.pdf \(safeguardingni.org\)](#) and [Briefing paper No. 2 - The influence of paramilitarism in Northern Ireland on the recognition of child sexual exploitation in young males, November 2020, Dr. Jacqui Montgomery-Devlin.](#)

It is widely understood that harms relating to CCE, including grooming may be under-reported in Northern Ireland, and it is, therefore, difficult to be definitive about

the issues you enquire about in respect of scope, including around location, the associations of perpetrators and the numbers of young people affected. However, research such as that reflected in the reports above, and the testimony of subject matter experts from a variety of statutory, community and voluntary organisations show that CCE is a problem that affects all communities where organised crime gangs seek to coerce, control and exploit.

More generally, there are a number of reports in the public domain that provide extensive detail on the impact of paramilitarism on communities. These include the 2024 Report of the House of Commons Northern Ireland Affairs Committee (NIAC) on [‘The effect of paramilitary activity and organised crime on society in Northern Ireland’](#) and the annual reports of the [Independent Reporting Commission](#).

The recent NIAC report noted, for example, that:

‘Throughout our inquiry, we heard distressing evidence of the cruelty and harm that people involved in paramilitary activity and organised crime continue to be responsible for within communities in Northern Ireland. We were told how groups are engaged in drug dealing, housing intimidation, illegal money lending, extortion, human trafficking, sexual exploitation including of children, child abuse and other criminal activities to profit and exercise coercive control over communities. We also heard that, while the harm wreaked by groups in Northern Ireland is widespread and severe, it also affects different communities in different ways.’

For relevant information on young women’s experiences of paramilitarism in Northern Ireland you may wish to read the recently published academic report, ‘When you know what they are capable of: Paramilitary-related Gendered Coercive Control Research Report 2024’ [Read the report here](#). This evidences the coercive net in which some women (and their children) live their lives – how paramilitary-influenced coercion colours their intimate, familial and community relationships. Locality based reports covering areas with a traditionally high level of paramilitary prevalence can be found [here](#).

You may also wish to view the recently published [CCE Action Plan](#), launched by Ministers of Justice, Health and Education on 30th Sept 2024. This is a cross-

departmental and multi-agency plan to address CCE in Northern Ireland along with an agreed definition for CCE which you can view [here](#).

The action plan builds on the work of EPPOC to broaden it and create a systemic safeguarding response rather than a programme approach. The planned work will help prevent at risk young people becoming involved in paramilitary activity and address the underlying issues that put some young people at higher risk of being exploited.

To support the launch of the CCE action plan, EPPOC, supported by the Departments for Justice, Health and Education, also launched the third and final video of their series that aims to improve the awareness of the impact of paramilitarism, you can view it [here](#).

On 10 July 2024, the Department of Justice published the 'Northern Ireland Modern Slavery & Human Trafficking Strategy 2024-2027', which can be found [here](#). The Strategy outlines the links between CCE and modern slavery & human trafficking and includes a commitment to utilise modern slavery & human trafficking legislation in improving the system wide response to CCE in Northern Ireland.

Other documents that you may find useful include:

- Developing Women in the Community Programme, Colm Walsh (QUB) pilot report: <https://pure.qub.ac.uk/en/publications/developing-women-in-the-community-a-formative-prepost-test-evalua>
- Child Sexual Exploitation in Northern Ireland – Report of the Independent Inquiry (2014) <https://www.rqia.org.uk/RQIA/files/ab/abd42905-a3b8-4e94-8d77-0f50734bc77c.pdf>
- 'Not a World Away – The sexual exploitation of Young People in Northern Ireland' (2011) https://www.barnardos.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/Not%20a%20world%20away%20-%20The%20sexual%20exploitation%20of%20children%20and%20young%20people%20in%20North%20Ireland%20-%20Full%20report_1.pdf

- Gender, Violence and Cultures of Silence – Young Women and Paramilitary Violence (2021)
<https://pureadmin.qub.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/242196193/gender.pdf>

If, further to receiving this response, you feel you would like to refine a further request for information, the Programme Team would be happy to consider this, or for you to be in touch with them direct for a background briefing on the work undertaken on the Programme.

If you are unhappy with the result of your request for information you may request an internal review within two calendar months of the date of this letter. If you request an internal review please do so in writing stating the reasons to the address above.

If following an internal review you were to remain dissatisfied you may make a complaint to the Information Commissioner and ask the Commissioner to investigate whether the DOJ has complied with the terms of the FOIA. You can write to the Information Commissioner at:

Information Commissioner
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF

The Commissioner will not investigate a complaint unless an internal review procedure has been carried out.

Further details on the role of the Information Commissioner and the handling of appeals can be found at: www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk

Yours sincerely

Records & Information Manager