



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Justice

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Criminal Justice Bill: Organised Crime Task
Force Immigration and Human Trafficking
Subgroup

20 September 2012

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Paul Givan (Chairperson)
Mr Raymond McCartney (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Sydney Anderson
Mr Stewart Dickson
Mr Tom Elliott
Mr Seán Lynch
Mr Alban Maginness
Ms Rosaleen McCorley
Mr Jim Wells

Witnesses:

Ms Dawn Harmon	Department of Justice
Mr Simon Rogers	Department of Justice
Detective Supt Philip Marshall	Police Service of Northern Ireland
Mr Mike Golden	UK Border Agency

The Chairperson: I welcome Simon Rogers; the chair of the subgroup, PSNI Detective Superintendent Phil Marshall; Mike Golden from the UK Border Agency (UKBA), and Dawn Harmon of the community safety unit in the Department of Justice. I invite you to give us a brief outline, after which members will have some questions.

Mr Simon Rogers (Department of Justice): Thank you, Chair. I am sorry that you are hearing from me again. I will try to get through this so that you get to hear from my colleagues.

The background to this session is that the Department ran a consultation on the clauses that we have just discussed. That consultation brought responses on those clauses, but respondees also touched on other aspects of the EU directive as well as raising other, more general, human trafficking issues. The Department wrote to the Committee on 12 September, setting out the points raised about the directive. In that letter, we explained that we intended to address those in a paper to the Committee on compliance with the directive in general. The broader issues were set out in annex C to the 12 September paper. We explained that these had been referred to the immigration and human trafficking subgroup of the Organised Crime Task Force (OCTF). The Committee asked for an oral briefing, hence the officials and my colleagues are here today. All the organisations here — the police, UKBA and the community safety unit — are represented on that subgroup.

From the Organised Crime Task Force's '2012 Annual Report and Threat Assessment', members will be aware that organised immigration crime, including human trafficking, is one of our eight key threats.

The OCTF subgroup on immigration and human trafficking was created in about 2007-8, following an operation and based on particular lessons that were learned from that operation. The subgroup provides a multi-agency partnership approach to tackling human trafficking in Northern Ireland. It brings the key groups together to seek to ensure a joined-up approach. However, different groups will take forward work in their own areas. For instance, the police will undertake operations and the Department will lead on legislation.

I will take this opportunity to set out briefly the range of initiatives that are either going on or have been going on across these various organisations. It is important to demonstrate what other issues we are pursuing with the aim of assisting victims, raising awareness and prosecuting offenders, in addition to the steps that we are taking on the directive. So, for example, proactive investigations are ongoing against crime by the police, liaising, as relevant, with an Garda Síochána. Training is taken forward across the front — UKBA, Public Prosecution Service (PPS), health and social care staff, police and others. For example, some 2,500 police officers and staff have been trained.

I have already mentioned the sentencing guideline judgements, and they are a significant factor to be considered. The PPS launched the consultation document that I highlighted and will send to the Committee. The Department introduced and funds a package of support for all adult victims of human trafficking who are recovered in Northern Ireland, which is an area that I have been asked about in particular. Dawn is in the unit that leads on this work. The funding amounts to £140,000 per annum and includes meeting the cost of safe and appropriate accommodation, help with victims' day-to-day living expenses, access to healthcare, counselling, legal advice and specialist services during the recovery and reflection period. It is delivered on the Department's behalf by Migrant Help and its delivery partner, Women's Aid.

Guidance on the working arrangements for the welfare and protection of child victims that was developed by the Department of Justice and the Health Department was published in February 2011. It sets out information for practitioners, agencies, etc, involved in this area. The Department, working with the Health Department, is developing a document in which we are writing to the Committee to set out working arrangements for the welfare and protection of adult victims of human trafficking. That is primarily directed at the police and the health and social care trusts.

Raising awareness is another area of importance, and we have run various campaigns to encourage people to use Crimestoppers. We have produced leaflets such as 'Visitor or Victim', which are displayed in various ports, railway stations, and so on. We are planning a training needs analysis that will draw up a training plan, and we have done consultation on engagement with non-governmental organisations and will send you a paper on that in October. We have mentioned the work on compliance with the directive, and we are about to start work on a multilingual leaflet for victims in conjunction with Amnesty International. We have an event planned for 18 October to mark Anti-Trafficking Day and Anti-Slavery Day, and I have invited Committee members to that. We have been working on the first annual report of the interdepartmental ministerial group. A major piece of research called Changing the Mindset has been conducted across all organised crime areas, including human trafficking, and, of course, we have the work on Lord Morrow's Bill and the various reports.

I thought that it was important to quickly rattle through those issues to try to put in context the level of work that we are trying to take forward, not only in the Department but in the other organisations, to tackle organised crime and, particularly, human trafficking.

The Chairperson: Thank you for that, Mr Rogers. I recognise that considerable work is going on. I recall Detective Marshall speaking about this issue before, and that commentary stuck with me. Since then, and taking on board the work that has been happening, how effective are the police now in detecting that problem and arresting people? How effective are the agencies in helping and supporting the victims?

Detective Superintendent Philip Marshall (Police Service of Northern Ireland): The landscape has changed within the past three years in the investigation of human trafficking in Northern Ireland, and that is because of the work of the OCTF and some of the work of the PSNI as a law enforcement agency. OCTF is bringing together the groups, and it is primarily an operational meeting in an operational context. We are able to share information across agencies. That can speed up the process and identify duplication, and we can gather the information for investigative purposes.

I am very pleased with the work of the PSNI and the subgroup in the area of raising awareness. We talk to the community, and more information is being reported to the police, and that is directly leading to the recovery of victims. Mr Rogers said that the online training programme has 2,500 police

officers. The figure is now 2,800, and our percentage rate for the completion of that training is the highest of any police service in the United Kingdom. That programme has been driven by the subgroup. So, the landscape has changed in the past three years.

There are a number of ongoing investigations — I cannot get into the operational detail — that are focused on organised crime gangs involved in that type of crime, and the recent convictions in Northern Ireland of Matyas Pis and Rong Chen sent out a very strong signal that all parts of the criminal justice system are focused on that crime.

The Chairperson: Have those sentences been adequate?

Detective Superintendent Marshall: As a police officer, I cannot comment on sentences. Matyas Pis received three years on conviction. The judge said — and I am paraphrasing — that the level of offending was at the lower end of the scale, but he outlined that anybody who appears before the courts in Northern Ireland could expect to receive a custodial sentence. The second person who was convicted, Rong Chen, received a sentence of seven years. The trial judge will take factors into account in the context of a guilty plea, but that seven-year sentence was quite strong and sent out a very strong message. Other matters are still going through the criminal justice system, and it will be interesting to see the level of sentencing in those.

The Chairperson: When you identify the victims of this crime, is the level of support sufficient or is more needed?

Ms Dawn Harmon (Department of Justice): We closely monitor the contract that we have with the service provider and the subcontractor. That is done through a contract management group that reports to a human trafficking stakeholder group. We work with our contractors, as they do in turn with their subcontractors, on any ongoing problems that they might identify.

The contract was initially awarded for one year, with options to extend for a further two 12-month periods. In accordance with government procurement policy, there is a format for evaluating the contract after the first 12 months in order to avail ourselves of the first and second options. That was completed accordingly, and we awarded the contract for the second year on the basis that we were satisfied with it and with the feedback that we received from our PSNI colleagues.

Very shortly, we will embark on the evaluation of the second 12-month option. Thereafter, under procurement law, we will have to go out to tender, but at this moment we have very good co-operation with our service provider and the subcontractor.

Detective Superintendent Marshall: I will follow up on that, Chairperson. I sit on the national Association of Chief Police Officers regional representatives group on organised immigration crime and human trafficking. The structures in Northern Ireland, the level of co-operation across government agencies and the support networks for victims in Northern Ireland are looked on with envy by representatives from other parts of the United Kingdom.

The Chairperson: You will be aware of the EU directives on this issue that are coming forward and Lord Morrow's Bill. There has been a reasonable amount of discussion about prohibiting payment for sexual services in Northern Ireland. Does the group feel that that would be beneficial in tackling the problem?

Mr Simon Rogers: I hesitate to say anything about that at this stage, because we have not advised the Minister on Lord Morrow's Bill. It would be wrong for me to comment to the Committee on the Department of Justice's — that is, the Minister's — position.

I can say that we are looking at this matter closely and at the evidence highlighted by your researcher. It is clear from looking at the approach taken in Sweden, for example, that there are different views of that approach and we need to look at them. At this stage, until the Minister has had an opportunity to look at this, I would not want to set out a position.

Detective Superintendent Marshall: There is legislation available to law enforcement agencies at the moment that covers the purchase of sexual services from someone who has been subjected to exploitation. Our efforts to progress that legislation in Northern Ireland have proved to be problematic from an operational point of view. We are changing our focus across law enforcement in order to

report things to the PPS at an earlier stage of investigations so that we can take forward those types of matters.

The Chairperson: Why has that been problematic?

Detective Superintendent Marshall: The view that we took in a certain investigation was that we should prove that the person was the subject of exploitation, and that that proof would have to be obtained in a court hearing. The court hearing did not take place within the six months from the commission of the offence, and the offence was statute-barred. We will now take the view that, when a decision is made within the national referral mechanism that someone is a potential victim of human trafficking at an earlier stage, we will initiate proceedings at that time.

I echo what Mr Rogers has said about Lord Morrow's Bill. It would probably be best not to comment directly on specific pieces of legislation. I have some concerns that we may be putting criminal liability on to a person who is seeking to sell sex, in that that person may be entering into a conspiracy or aiding and abetting the commission of a criminal offence. We need to think about what the impact of any such legislation would be.

The Chairperson: Has the PSNI taken a corporate view at this point on that aspect?

Detective Superintendent Marshall: I am charged with writing a response to the consultation document, which will be forwarded to the Department of Justice in due course.

Mr Lynch: I see that the Garda Síochána sits on your subgroup. What approaches and strategies have been adopted across the island of Ireland to combat this type of crime?

Detective Superintendent Marshall: We have very good liaison with colleagues in an Garda Síochána. A representative from the Garda Síochána national immigration bureau sits on the subgroup, which shares operational knowledge and information. I also liaise closely with colleagues in the organised crime branch around the investigation of prostitution.

Given that an Garda Síochána links into a number of NGOs in the Republic of Ireland, that is our link into those. I deal with groups like Ruhama in Dublin, which deals with women who are involved in prostitution. We work closely with it. Indeed, colleagues in an Garda Síochána and Ruhama provide joint training to gardaí and PSNI colleagues around the investigation of human trafficking.

Mr Lynch: Do you have all-Ireland statistics on charges, convictions and sentencing?

Detective Superintendent Marshall: No; certainly not in one document, Mr Lynch, but I have those figures available. They would be available from colleagues in the gardaí. There is no one set of figures published for the island of Ireland around the number of victims who are recovered, but the gardaí publishes an annual report that breaks down the number of victims by age, gender and exploitation type.

Mr McCartney: Is there a relationship between the prosecution services, North and South, in how to take cases forward and in lessons learnt? How is that ascertained? Is it through the PPS, or is it part of the wider group?

Mr Simon Rogers: The PPS is on the subgroup. The equivalent body in the South is not. However, there would be liaison between the two in the same way that one of the cases is being prosecuted in Scotland, where certain evidence was found here and the decision was made between the two prosecution services that the case should be proceeded with in Scotland rather than here. There is liaison as necessary —

Mr McCartney: And it is done through the two groups rather than through the wider —

Mr Simon Rogers: Those are individual decisions on individual cases, so they would not be dealt with on the subgroup.

Mr Wells: Obviously, the traffic is cross-border. Is there evidence to indicate where the victims are coming into the island of Ireland? Are they coming into the Republic and then being trafficked into

Northern Ireland? Are they being brought across from Scotland or Heathrow or whatever? Do we know the point of entry for a lot of those extremely unfortunate individuals?

Detective Superintendent Marshall: The truthful answer, Mr Wells, is that we do not know. Trafficking, by its very nature, is a very hidden crime. We know what we know from the 81 victims who have been recovered over the past three years about their points of entry. Certainly, based on experience, the airports are the major way in, and then the ferry ports, as we would expect. We have seen UK victims being trafficked to Scotland and then into Northern Ireland by air and boat. We have seen victims coming into Dublin Airport and then being moved by car or public transport into Northern Ireland and other parts of the United Kingdom.

We have to remember that when we are dealing with human trafficking, you do not have to cross an international border; you can be as easily trafficked internally within your own country. The distance that you travel is immaterial.

Mr Wells: According to the study in which I am involved, the vast majority of those people have, at some stage, been shipped in from the Far East, eastern Europe or the Balkans. Those are the main routes in, as, sometimes, is western Africa. Although there is no doubt that it goes on internally, those people often do not know what country they are in. It is an absolute nightmare when you think about what they must go through: they have been promised a hairdressing job or a cookery job or whatever, they arrive and they are locked into a room for forced prostitution. It is an unimaginably painful issue.

You outlined the two cases in which you successfully secured a conviction, which is good news. Without revealing too much, can you tell us how much is in the pipeline in terms of people who have been brought up to courts and charged for trafficking? Do we know whether there is a major move to get people before the courts on this issue?

Detective Superintendent Marshall: In any investigations that I am leading on, Mr Wells, there is a drive to put people before the courts so that they can face justice. There are a number of ongoing investigations. I think that the PPS is considering charges on three cases, and those have reached the preliminary enquiry stage. More cases are coming through the pipeline of the criminal justice system.

Mr Wells: Do you have any contact with the agency that is allowing this to happen, which is the Foreign Office? Our evidence is that the vast majority of those people are legal. At some stage, they have had a legal document. I am certain that, by the time that you find them, the document has long disappeared into their minder's hands, but surely there has to be liaison between your group and the people who are granting the visas to allow those people to come in. None of them has a visa to come in and be trafficked; they have a visa for a totally legitimate profession. I would have thought that the trends are so clear that someone in Croydon who is granting these visas would start to spot a clear tendency of a lot of people applying from one country to be a certain profession, and try to cut it off at that stage. Is anyone thinking outside the box to try to stop that happening?

Mr Mike Golden (UK Border Agency): Mr Wells, I represent the UK Border Agency, and, of course, we partner the UK Border Force, which protects our borders. I listened to what you said in the first session about people coming through Ireland. It is not complacency, but, to give you some assurance that we are moving forward all the time on this, the introduction of the national referral mechanism has brought the agencies together and gives us a lot more intelligence about what is cropping up in terms of countries and modi operandi and about how people are getting into the UK or even, indeed, Ireland.

It is not so much down to the people in Croydon. There are two challenges for the UK Border Agency and the UK Border Force. This is where our strategy goes. The first is to take action at the border and prevent people from coming in who can be trafficked, and, obviously, identify the traffickers. The second is to have an effective mechanism to give support and advice to people who have been victims of trafficking when we encounter and identify them in-country. On the issue of the border, for many countries, it is not Croydon but overseas where the visas are processed, allowing people to come through to the UK. We have a national profiling system, and we notify trends, such as Vietnam or Nigeria, which are high-risk countries in those terms. We work with the source countries and their officials to advise them overseas that there are high instances of traffickers being encountered. In the context of Northern Ireland, we also work with the European hubs, because people are not flying directly from west Africa, but to, for example, Spain or Holland. We also liaise with the Irish authorities to try to ensure that those responsible for the whole border of Northern Ireland and Southern Ireland

are aware of and have intelligence on the things to look out for. That has been increasingly effective since the introduction of the national referral model.

What we also have to do — and this is the difficult bit. You are right to say that victims of trafficking can come into the country legally. Our UK Border Force officers who work at the border and see people coming off a plane, whether from Europe or wherever, have all been highly trained to look out for the indicators of trafficking, and there are many of those. You can imagine some of them: nervousness, not being able to look at you, not being comfortable with who they are with, coming from a country in which we know trafficking can be quite a prominent thing.

We are not ineffective at the border, but it is a difficulty and a challenge that people come here with a work visa or a student visa and expect to land where they land and take up their job or student visa. They expect that right through the control point, if you like, at the border. Perhaps someone will have told them that they have set it all up for up them so that everything will be fine when they are there. In fact, they are duped. Especially at international airports, a lot of indicators do not apply. People are not showing signs of nervousness or indicators that they are being trafficked. At that point, as far as they are concerned, they have not been. The fine line is between facilitation and trafficking. As we know, facilitation refers to people who have paid, perhaps, \$10,000 to get into the UK with a facilitator, thinking that they are going to have a good economic life, based on what they promised them. That is illegal, but they will not be nervous and upset about it when they arrive at the border point. It is difficult, because people do arrive on legal visas and get through, and the trouble starts for those people when they are actually in the country. They are duped into where they will be living and into whatever terrible type of trafficking that they have been victim to. That is where the police come in, and that is where other intelligence comes in. So it is quite difficult, but we have better intelligence now, and UK Border Force staff are highly trained so that even if a person is quite content, there are lots of other indicators in parts of their journey into the country that they will take into account at the border. Internally, the job of the UK Border Agency is to make that national referral model work, so that people who are presented or found to be victims of trafficking can be got through the system with support, advice and as little hassle as possible.

We make the important decisions as to whether a person is a victim of trafficking. So we are the competent authority — the UK Border Agency in partnership with the UK Human Trafficking Centre — to decide whether a person has been trafficked, and whether they should be allowed to stay longer in the country to help the police to get to the organised crime or criminals behind that. So it is a very difficult area.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cathaoirleach. Do you feel that the current level of services, access to legal aid and support for victims is sufficient?

Mr Golden: I cannot really comment on that. What I can say is that the partnership that we have — as the UK Border Agency builds on its presence in Northern Ireland and becomes more responsive to these issues — has no serious issues with the joined-upness of the services at this point. There are not a high number of referrals coming to the UK Border Agency in Northern Ireland. Overall, including European, UK, and non-European referrals in 2011, some 32 came through the UK Human Trafficking Centre.

Detective Superintendent Marshall: The level of support that is provided under the contract, through the Department, by Migrant Help and Women's Aid, from an operational level, provides a very good service. For example, if I enter a brothel location and recover a victim of human trafficking, Migrant Help will be there within the hour to provide that assistance, or, as they say, to provide a shoulder to cry on. They assist all the partners in the Organised Crime Task Force on that issue. I have no problems with those organisations at all.

Ms Harmon: That service kicks in straight away, despite the fact that, technically speaking, they are only responsible once the victim has received the "reasonable grounds" decision that he or she is a potential victim of human trafficking. However, these people are not left to fend for themselves. The service provider is in there at the beginning and, from the point of view of managing the contract, it will be retrospectively backdated to the time of a raid. The service provider is usually on the scene at the time of a raid or when we have initially gone in, so there is no delay. The service provider is there with a shoulder to cry on and interpreters. They will provide safe accommodation. Risk assessments are done on that. The front line staff are highly trained, at least to Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner level 1, which is quite a high standard of qualification. They will help the victim. They

will provide clothes and — depending upon what time of day it is — a welcome meal, toiletries and basic needs for the victim, together with as much support as they can give at that traumatic time.

Ms McCorley: Does that support continue?

Ms Harmon: The support continues under the contract until the victim receives the "conclusive grounds" decision, which comes from the competent authority which, as Mike said, is the UKBA.

It can take some time to move from the day that the competent authority gives that "conclusive grounds" decision until the victim becomes eligible for social support and benefits. However, the contractors will keep providing the service until such times as the victim receives benefits and is eligible for everything that they can provide in the country. Again, we will pay them and reimburse them up to that stage, when they are eligible for resources.

Mr Dickson: I want to continue on the work that the UK Border Agency is doing and the need for you to have appropriate and shared intelligence. Presumably, when somebody presents themselves at a border point in Northern Ireland with, for example, a student visa, pre-checks are done or are available to you in respect of our universities and colleges, because if people are coming in from outside the EU, you will need that information. If they are coming to work for an employer, they will need to know the name and address of the employer. I take it that all those things are checked pre, during or post somebody coming through a border point.

Mr Golden: Yes, under the points-based system, the colleges, universities and employers have to sponsor people to come to work. So, the person who arrives will have to have a visa, we will have to know where they are going, the conditions under which they are coming and who their sponsor is. Our systems do those checks before they cross the border. The points-based system can be bucked, if it is organised enough, because it is organised criminals who are behind this. Even then, even if somebody is turning up happy and thinking that they are going to a university, etc, our intelligence and border officials will ask questions if they know it is a high-risk kind of situation or country. Even if they get the answers right, you know, you are talking about a victim of trafficking. There are indicators that it is rehearsed, or that they are relying on the person with them to answer the questions, or most of the questions, for them. Our staff are skilled in exploring cases. I am not saying that we are always perfect. We cannot be, because we find victims of trafficking here, but we are getting better.

Our work with the Irish authorities is very close. The thing that hit the papers yesterday — the case that Phil talked about — was a good example of that. That chap had three years, but we deported him back to Hungary on Tuesday. We were working with the police and the prison authorities so that nothing could slip. When that man came out of prison, we were there to put him back to his country. We also got intelligence out to the European countries to say that we did not want the chap to try to get back to the UK. Our own warning systems will not let that man back into the UK. We have warned our colleagues in Ireland about it, and their systems know that we do not want this man. We have closed the net, I would say, on that man and, typically, other people like him, getting back into Northern Ireland or other parts of the UK.

Mr Dickson: That shows the immense value of the intelligence and joined-up work between you and external organisations and between you and all the other players in the area. Given the imminent demise of the Serious and Organised Crime Agency and the introduction of the new organisation, the National Crime Agency (NCA), can we be assured that we will be delivered a seamless transfer from one organisation to the other?

Mr Simon Rogers: We have been to the Committee already on the work of the National Crime Agency, and we have secured approval to work towards a legislative consent motion. That is before the Executive at the minute. Obviously, assuming that that proceeds, there is no doubt that we want a seamless transition from one organisation to another.

Mr Dickson: Clearly, it is important that there is no chink in the armour with regard to intelligence, the work of the UK Border Agency and the work of the PSNI. That has to be an iron curtain, if you like, and a very difficult broad border to get this heinous crime through.

Detective Superintendent Marshall: When you talk about the Serious and Organised Crime Agency, one of the key factors is that the UK Human Trafficking Centre is part of that organisation. From a law enforcement point of view, it is the link into the wider European law enforcement family. We regularly

share intelligence and information with Europol. If I have an alert and a piece of information within an investigation in Northern Ireland, that is alerted across Europe via the human trafficking centre. Just last week, I talked to colleagues in the human trafficking centre about what will happen when the NCA comes into being. They do not see a change in the service that is provided to Northern Ireland. They are very keen that it will be business as usual and that there will be a seamless transition.

Mr Dickson: So, we can be assured that those people will still be in place and that the NCA will have a similar, if not identical, organisation?

Detective Superintendent Marshall: Yes, it will provide exactly the same service.

Mr Anderson: In investigation and prosecution terms, have you found a problem with the victims coming forward with information? Do they drop out of the situation? Can you get the information from them?

Detective Superintendent Marshall: Historically, in law enforcement, seeking the support of the victims of human trafficking was a difficulty. Over the past number of years, because of some training we have put in place, we have secured the support of some victims. In the case of Rong Chen, it took three years to get a successful conclusion, and the witnesses/victims in that case stayed with law enforcement the whole way and were very supportive.

One of the issues when you talk about human trafficking is that for victims to be referred to the national referral mechanism, we need their support. They physically have to sign the form to enter into that system. With the control factors that the traffickers have over the victims, that can prove problematic, and on some occasions, we have recovered people in Northern Ireland who we, as law enforcement, believe to be victims of human trafficking but who will not self-declare that. Those people are lost in the system as an official figure. They will want to return to their country of origin.

We try very hard to secure the support of the victims. We reinforce, in the initial discussions, the protection measures that law enforcement can bring to a victim throughout the criminal justice system. There are victims who have been recovered in Northern Ireland who have entered the witness protection scheme and been provided with special protection at the court cases. That is something that we concentrate on to secure the support of victims. That is reinforced by Migrant Help and Women's Aid, which can provide additional support.

Mr Anderson: You talk about entering the protection scheme. Is there any evidence about who is operating the criminal gangs involved? Is there any paramilitary involvement, in any way?

Detective Superintendent Marshall: The investigations in Northern Ireland that I have been involved in have involved European crime gangs working with Northern Ireland crime gangs. Some of those individuals have had historic links to paramilitary groups.

The Chairperson: In how many cases do you find that you believe that someone is the victim of human trafficking but that person will not self-declare?

Detective Superintendent Marshall: That is hard to quantify. Not having the hard data, I will refer to what the national statistics say. In 2011, a baseline assessment was carried out by the Human Trafficking Centre. Approximately 940 individuals were referred to the national referral mechanism, which is a conglomeration of the figures for the UK as a whole. The baseline assessment was that the true figure was in and around 2,070, so less than 50% of the people encountered end up being referred to the national referral mechanism. It is safe to say that the position would be similar in Northern Ireland.

The Chairperson: So, there is no mechanism where, potentially one in two cases — unless they self-declare that, you are not able to pursue that if you have the evidence, even though the victim is not declaring that they believe they are subject to it.

Detective Superintendent Marshall: No. The position is that the victim has to self-declare to enter the national referral mechanism. As a police officer, I am bound by section 32 of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000. So, if I think that an offence has been committed, I have a duty and an obligation to investigate. Not having a witness may cause you difficulties when you are progressing that investigation, but we are still obligated and we still carry out investigations.

The Chairperson: I understand better now.

Finally, where does Northern Ireland rank in the level of concern, compared with everywhere else in the United Kingdom? Is Northern Ireland at the top of the scale and seen as a conduit for trafficking to the rest of the UK? Where are we in the level of concern?

Mr Golden: In population, Northern Ireland is not way up there, proportionately, with the other three countries. London is the biggest concern in the UK; it and the north-east are where the highest number and the highest identification figures are. In Northern Ireland, the numbers are smaller. However, it is no less of a priority for the UK Border Agency and the authorities to protect people from those crimes.

The Chairperson: So you do not look at Northern Ireland and think that we have got the Irish Republic and, therefore, we are a channel for people who come in initially to the Republic and up into Northern Ireland and then onwards? Is that not something that presents particular concern?

Detective Superintendent Marshall: No. When I look at the national referral mechanism figures for the UK as a whole, the percentages from Northern Ireland against the population of Northern Ireland are comparable to those in England, Scotland and Wales. We have a slightly different picture in Northern Ireland when we talk about one particular type of exploitation, which is sexual exploitation, because the prostitution market in Northern Ireland, and Ireland as a whole, is different from what it is in England, where it is more on-street based. Here it is off-street prostitution, which has a different dynamic, which then may lead to victims being trafficked for that purpose.

I heard a reference to the Swedish model earlier. Some of the figures coming out of the Swedish model show that it was addressing on-street prostitution. On-street prostitution in Northern Ireland is very limited, and we have to be careful to compare apples with apples and not apples with pears.

The Chairperson: That has been very useful. Thank you very much.