

THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN OUTSIDE THE UNITED KINGDOM

Investigation into Child Sexual Abuse related to Child Migration Programmes Background Statement

1. The case study into child sexual abuse related to child migration programmes concerns an extraordinary episode in the history of England and Wales, which ended relatively recently and about which there remains relatively little public awareness today. The permanent migration of British children, who were often vulnerable, poor, abandoned, illegitimate and / or in the care of the state, took place on a large scale. In its 1998 review of the welfare of former British child migrants, the House of Commons Select Committee on Health estimated that 150,000 British children were sent abroad pursuant to child migration programmes. According to available records, child migration occurred over a 350-year period: the first groups of child migrants were sent to Virginia in the early seventeenth century, and the last to Australia as late as 1970.
2. Existing studies have identified that the underlying motivations for child migration from England and Wales were mixed, and shifted over time. Child migration programmes were driven in part by economic, political and cultural factors: both British and colonial governments regarded child migration as carrying the perceived benefits of reducing the costs to the state of maintaining destitute children while meeting labour shortages in the colonies and populating the empire with white, British people. Child migration programmes were also increasingly undertaken for 'benevolent' purposes, ostensibly in order to provide impoverished children with new opportunities and a better life overseas.
3. Most British child migrants, some as young as two years old, were sent to Canada, Australia and Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). It appears that the consent of a parent or legal guardian was sought in some but not all cases. More recently, it has emerged that some children were wrongly told that they were orphans, and were separated from their families and deprived of basic details about their identities. In the receiving countries, most children were placed with families or in farm schools where they provided labour and domestic services.
4. Child migrants were frequently subjected to harsh conditions and physical abuse in the receiving countries. Some former child migrants have also alleged that they were subjected to sexual abuse either prior to their migration, in homes and other institutions in England and Wales, and/or at the institutions to which they were sent. The House of

Commons Select Committee on Health found that sexual abuse of child migrants in some institutions in Australia was widespread, systematic and exceptionally depraved.

5. The UK Government has acknowledged that children were mistreated in child migration programmes. In 2010, then Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, made a public apology to former child migrants. The responsibility of some of the receiving institutions for the sexual abuse of children, and the adequacy of reparations to former child migrants, are currently under consideration by the Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and have been considered in previous public inquiries in Australia.
6. However, to date, no public inquiry in the UK has undertaken a sustained and specific analysis of allegations of sexual abuse of child migrants and possible failings by institutions based in England and Wales in relation to that abuse. Many former child migrants are of advancing age and/or in poor health, making this investigation particularly urgent for the Inquiry.