**APPG on Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery**

**14th October 2020**

**Panel discussion on child exploitation at the Channel ports**

APPG Co-Chair Karen Bradley MP hosted a panel discussion on the trafficking of children from the European Channel Ports. On the panel were Beth Gardiner Smith, CEO of Safe Passage, Baroness Butler-Sloss (co-chair), Professor Vernon Coaker (Nottingham University), Rt Hon Fiona MacTaggart (ex-MP), and Dame Sara Thornton (Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner).

Beth Gardiner explained how Safe Passage supports unaccompanied children in Calais, identifying those children with family connections in the UK who although entitled to safe passage into the UK had no way of exercising their rights. It was the lack of legal routes that pushed people into risking the most dangerous journeys to get to the UK, and children in particular were vulnerable to exploitation. She also explained how conditions in the migrant camps in Calais had severely deteriorated during the pandemic, with consistent reports of violence against children. There are safe and legal routes for children – Dubs Amendment and Dublin 3 are there but there’s deep concern about what will happen at the end of the year when those routes are no longer available.

Dame Sara Thornton stressed the need to view this as a safeguarding issue, and that there is a need for greater cooperation with law enforcement. Jackie Doyle-Price MP raised hopes that the investigation into the Essex lorry deaths after convictions will shed further light on this trafficking. Fiona McTaggart said that the Government should publish the specified number for Dubs and create an end-to-end process for these children. There is an important issue that it takes so long for children to hear anything from anybody that they give up on the system. What is needed is a mechanism that the children can believe in, and that will get the traffickers out of business. Lord Dubs mentioned that his Amendment was passed in Lords and is now on its way to the Commons. Elizabeth Butler-Sloss stated that this was not an immigration issue, but a child protection issue. Vernon Coaker explained how international cooperation will be even more crucial between parliaments and non-government organisations after 31 December.

The co-chairs closed the meeting by emphasising the need for greater debate and pressure on Government.