

NOVEMBER 2021

# Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Newsletter

## In this issue:

### JESS PHILLIPS MP

We look into the constituencies of the Commonwealth Games, and what needs to happen ahead of mega sporting events

### KWAME AYEWE:

Meet the professional footballer who saw trafficking through sports first hand, and hear how he fought it.

### TRAFFICKING IN CHILDREN'S INSTITUTIONS

Register for this event by LUMOS, the international charity investigating the link between orphanage institutions and child trafficking

### SURVIVOR ADVOCATE:

### EDAFE MATTHEW ESEOGHENE

We speak to the man who survived trafficking, and is now an international advocate in the fight against it

**"A football player from Ghana, who had been trafficked, had been returned to his country. This is an example of how our work is making an impact and it gives me such joy"**

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# Matthew: Facing Human Trafficking on the Front Lines



## Edafe Matthew Eseoghene: Survivor, Ambassador, and International Advocate for Fighting Sports Trafficking

### How were you trafficked through sport?

Someone who claimed to be an agent came to where we were staying in Delta State and said he can take me to a club in England where multiple trials were happening. He claimed that I was very talented. I was surprised when I caught the attention of these people as I didn't think I was a good enough football player.

I had to raise money for a Visa, flights, interviews and invitation fees. At the time, it cost 350,000 Naira, which is less than \$1000 dollars now, but at the time it was a lot of money. My mother had to take out a loan which had a large interest rate on it.

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We ran for miles on the beach each day. It quickly escalated from hard work to suffering. There was a lack of food, so many people started working at the food market.

”



Eventually the process began, and he took me to the passport office to collect my documents and visa. We travelled from Nigeria to Senegal and then to Cape Verde. As we were travelling, we stopped off at Senegal to collect a British visa.

The agent took my passport in Senegal, and we ended up training there for a couple of months, to acclimatise and prepare for Cape Verde.

We ran miles on the beach each day. It quickly escalated from hard work to suffering. There was a lack of food, so many people started working at the food market. This consisted of transporting the fish from the nets, down to the marketplace. Occasionally you get paid with fish and other times in currency.

**As a survivor advocate, what do you think is the most important prevention to trafficking through sport?**

I would say it is education. The primary reason people are trafficked from Africa is poverty. Let me give you the parallel. Boys from the United Kingdom may not get excited if you offer to take them to Barcelona, Madrid or Milan. None of those cities offer them anything different. Everything in Africa is about money. Because of poverty and lack of information, it puts everyone in a desperate position to get out of the country. Anything would be better than staying in the country.

In order to stop trickery, people need to be educated. We can educate people to make them understand that they don't need to fall for this terrible life.

I have been around many schools, and they do not teach on the issue of trafficking through sport in Nigeria or surrounding countries.

In 2018 and 2019, I visited every Nigerian academy, campaigning to raise awareness on the issue of trafficking through sport and the dangers of fake agents. This included background checks and the ability to talk to the people around you.

I noticed that such a large percentage of young people are on social media. If we can get campaigns on these platforms, and share signs of trafficking through sport, this could become more prominent in people's awareness.

— “ —

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— ” —

## What is your involvement with Mission 89?

I started as the content creator, running campaigns for Mission 89 around football academies and helping to sensitise people to fake agents. We had a very successful campaign that reached 726 footballers.

Last year in July, I was asked to be Mission 89's Ambassador. In this role, I am the face of the campaigns and ensure the message of sport trafficking is being carried along.

I help build relationships between victims and the Mission 89 team. I complete many of these tasks through my radio studio and YouTube channel, [Elegbete TV Sports](#).



[Access the radio show here](#)



Lerina, Founder of Mission 89, broke the news recently that a footballer player from Ghana, who had been trafficked, had been returned to his country. This is an example of how our work is making an impact and it gives me such joy.



# PHOTO OF THE MONTH AUSTRALIA

View of the  
Asia-Pacific Regional  
Workshop: The Role of  
Parliamentary Committees  
in Combatting Human  
Trafficking & Forced  
Labour, December 2019.  
Photo by CPA UK

If you have raised awareness of human trafficking through sport in your constituency, region or local area, and would like to share photographs of your work, email us at [cpauk@parliament.uk](mailto:cpauk@parliament.uk)

# An Interview with Jess Phillips MP



## The Constituencies of the Commonwealth Games: Talking to Jess Phillips MP

**As a Birmingham based MP, you must be anticipating exciting changes and developments in the lead up to the Commonwealth Games in 2022.**

**But what sort of changes, whether they are positive or negative, do you see in your constituency in the run up to the Games?**

Every day in my constituency we experience the grass not being cut in the parks, and our playgrounds falling into rack and ruins. The children have very little places to play. I think there is a jarring nature about why this 'fancy' event is happening.

Of course, it is not the same government money, but that doesn't stop people feeling less positive about it. For example, the number 11 bus, which is one of the longest

bus routes in Europe, has been diverted due to the construction of the Games. It is now a longer route, which stops in my constituency, off-loading a lot of confused people.

However, I do think it will positively touch the whole city in many ways. Considering every school in my constituency has a student from a different Commonwealth country, it is something we need to celebrate.



## **How were you first made aware of the issue of trafficking through sport?**

I was first made aware of this issue when CPA UK reached out to me. It is when you are made aware of the issue that you understand how aspirational young people can be exploited in this way. It will not just be young people, but anyone with aspiration, especially individuals without resources.

“  
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”

I think what a lot of people fail to realise is that being an elite sports person costs a huge amount of money and investment, and this creates a barrier for talented people around the world. Hope can be a dangerous currency.

## **How do you think other Parliamentarians can be made aware of trafficking through sport? What do you think is most effective?**

A way to get parliamentarians involved and engaged is by having one-to-one meetings and talking to them directly about the project you would like them to be involved with.

There is also great power in using real life examples from survivor advocates, as their stories are always the most impactful when thinking about the issue of trafficking.

Modern slavery is something I personally come across week in week out in Birmingham, but for some parliamentarians, it won't happen in or around their constituencies. Therefore, telling these stories is important to help portray to parliamentarians the issues that can occur, from the people who are most knowledgeable on the issue.

The best and quickest thing I can do is to talk to the organisation running the Commonwealth Games to discuss trafficking through sport, and the ways the organisation are addressing this issue. My city is a great place, and we don't want to talk about dark things, however this issue still remains important.

It is also vital to talk to the young people in colleges and schools in my constituency, as this is another powerful way to promote the issue. Your communication materials, such as the poster and leaflet, are the sort of campaigns that my constituents will learn from and will encourage them to report any suspicious cases to me as their parliamentarian. This is what we want to encourage.



# Introducing: Dr James Esson's Work on Human Trafficking Through Sport



## Academic in the field: Dr Esson on his Work on Sport Trafficking

### Why did you choose to look at sport trafficking from an academic perspective?

I became interested in this topic completely by chance. In 2008, I came across a news article on the internet titled 'The scandal of Africa's trafficked players' by Dan McDougall.

The author spoke to youth in West Africa and across Europe in an attempt to expose how their passion for sport was used by fraudsters to exploit them for financial gain.

As a Ghanaian by a birth and parentage, the accounts of my fellow Africans going through hardships touched me on a personal level. Even if it was a small contribution, I wanted to try and shed light on this issue and offer some recommendations.

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As a human geographer, I was fascinated by sport trafficking for three reasons. Firstly, I was struck by the importance of place. Football related trafficking is fundamentally underpinned by inequality between regions and/or countries.

In fact, I would even argue that human trafficking and irregular migration more generally are also underpinned by inequality. So I decided to investigate the relationship between uneven development and trafficking in-person, using football as a case study.

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Secondly, it occurred to me that media accounts and the efforts of NGOs tend to depict human trafficking as something that only happens to women and children. I would even dare to suggest that many of the readers of this newsletter see a woman or young child when they close their eyes and imagine a victim of human trafficking.

So these cases of young West African men as trafficking victims disrupts the stereotypical understanding of who is and is not considered to be a legitimate victim of human trafficking.

I was therefore keen to explore how a person's social characteristics, e.g. race and age, might impact how they are actually treated by organisations and agencies who in theory are supposed to support and protect them.

Thirdly, I wanted to try to understand the behaviour and decision making of young people who might be susceptible to or have been involved in football related trafficking.

More specifically, I wanted to help academics and policy makers try to find answers to an important question. How is one person able to exercise and abuse power over another person? This question is key to understanding and counteracting the recruitment of potential irregular migrants.

### **Why do you think many people have not heard of sport trafficking?**

This is a great question. Unfortunately, I do not have a definitive answer! One possible reason is that human trafficking and modern slavery are commonly associated with certain industries and contexts. For many people, sport is not one of those industries and contexts.

I touched on another possible reason above, which is that the people impacted by this phenomena are not the stereotypical victims of human trafficking. This might have implications for how, if and where stories on this topic are given coverage.

Last and not least, human trafficking involves what are known as 'hidden populations'.

In other words, these are populations that are associated with illegal and/or stigmatised behaviour. For example, young people embroiled in sport trafficking can find themselves staying in a destination country without a legal right to remain.

Drawing attention to their plight could result in detention and/or deportation. So they are unlikely to make publicise their presence.

Similarly, it is well documented that there is an increase in trafficking of young people when mega sports events take place.

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Human trafficking involves what are known as 'hidden populations' - populations that are associated with illegal and/or stigmatised behaviour.  
”

These young people are often placed in exploitative and illegal positions that make it difficult for their voices to be heard.

That all being said, there have been several high profile news articles and documentaries over the last few years on sport related trafficking. Hopefully policy makers can work with relevant agencies to raise awareness.

## For someone who is new to your work, what would you say they should start with?

My article in the [Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies](#) titled 'Better off at home? Rethinking responses to trafficked West African footballers in Europe' is open access and for academic text quite reader-friendly.

It provides a clear outline of the key phases of football related trafficking and provides insights into the experiences and mindsets of young men who claim to have been trafficked through football.



[Access the article here.](#)



# REPORT OF THE MONTH

This month's report comes from Dr James Esson from Loughborough University. He investigates the complicated world of who does and does not appear to be a trafficking victim in the eyes of those that are seeking to help them.


Click on the report to download it.

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WILEY

**SPECIAL ISSUE PAPER**

## Playing the victim? Human trafficking, African youth, and geographies of structural inequality

**James Esson** 

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**Abstract**

This article explores the role of agency in determining who is and is not considered to be a legitimate victim of human trafficking. It draws on critical human trafficking scholarship and research on the life chances of West African youth. This is complemented by qualitative data from youth embroiled in football-related human trafficking. The insights from these analyses are brought into conversation with theoretical work on the geographies of commodities. This results in the concept of "the football trafficking fetish," which is used to theorise how and why the agency of mobile youthful African male bodies undermines their claims of being trafficked human beings. The findings that emerge are significant in two ways. First, they generate theoretical insights on the coexistence of agency and exploitation in young lives and how young people's aspirations and agency can be (mis)read and work against them. Second, they provide a unique illustration of how human trafficking is a product of capitalism yet can be presented as a form of behaviour that lies outside of capitalist social relations. To centre these social relations and foster new forms of critical dialogue within and beyond population geography, the article concludes by recommending we consider the implications of conceptualising people as susceptible to rather than vulnerable to human trafficking.

**KEYWORDS**  
Africa, agency, development, human trafficking, mobility, youth

**1 | INTRODUCTION**

Reports of human trafficking within the football industry involving male West African youth have attracted academic, political, and media interest since the mid-1990s (Darby, Akindele, & Kirwin, 2007; Donnelly & Petherick, 2004; Esson, 2015a; Gilbert, 2015). Poli (2010a) noted that these accounts typically depict the following two processes. In some cases, after giving funds to an intermediary claiming to have contacts with professional football clubs abroad, a young player does indeed obtain a contract or trial with a club albeit of an exploitative nature. This is known as "human trafficking in football" (see Edwards, 2015). However, in most cases, the alleged interest from a foreign club is bogus, and the intermediary abandons the player on arrival in a destination country. This is often after taking the player's documentation and money. Once the precarious nature of their situation is realized, the player is often said to be too ashamed to return home. He remains in the destination country illegally without any means of subsistence. This is known as "human trafficking through football" (see Pattinson, 2018). Human trafficking in football and human trafficking through football are often conflated together under the term "football trafficking."

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If you have participated or come across a report or publication that enriches the understanding of tackling modern slavery and human trafficking, and would like to share it on this newsletter, email us at [cpauk@parliament.uk](mailto:cpauk@parliament.uk)

# Kwame: The Footballer who saw Human Trafficking Happen



Ben Radford @ Getty Images

## Introducing Kwame Ayew: Former Professional Footballer who saw and Fought Sports Trafficking

**How did you first get into your career as a professional football player for Ghana?**

I grew up with many siblings in a small village. My older brother is a three-time best footballer. He has two sons playing football, including one for Crystal Palace in the UK. He was approached by scouts who watched him play and eventually took him to the big city.

This is where he became the best young football player in the whole of Ghana. He got a scholarship to a secondary school in the Northern part of Ghana and was playing for a club called Real Tamale United.

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My brother  
was my agent  
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France.  
”

I later joined Ghana Secondary School, where I also played football. My brother saw me play and encouraged me to play football in Europe.

At the age of 16, when I was still at school playing football, I was approached by a team from the Western part of Ghana. I ended up playing with them for two years, until Africa Sports heard about my skills.

It was my brother and his team in France, who watched me play football. My brother was my agent and safely took me to France. My performance in the 1992 Barcelona Olympic Games encouraged other clubs to offer me professional contracts. I was awarded the second top scorer (securing six goals), a bronze medal and an Olympic silver boot.

It was whilst I was playing in Qatar that I was then approached by an Italian agent, saying they needed a striker. Despite the frustration from my club chairmen, it was my ultimate goal to play in Italy, so I did.

**When playing football, were you exposed to people being trafficked through or around sport?  
What were the red flags?**

It was in Italy when I first experienced trafficking through sport. I would often be training and receive a call from the club saying there were individuals at the stadium, asking for me.

Most of the time they were footballers who had been trafficked and left hopeless by their agents.

I would often find that they had been abandoned by their agents after not having got into the team. They contacted me, as a recognisable Ghanaian football player, as they felt they could trust me. I saw the desperation and anger in their eyes.

“  
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I took care of these victims, often taking them to the Embassy and making sure they got return travel tickets. Visas are more likely to be granted if you are an athlete. Many of the athletes would therefore receive one-to-two-month visas, which would then expire in Europe.

I have looked after some of these victims in hospital, including some who have had frost bite from when walking between Turkey and Greece. Many others will refuse to go home, and I will not hear from them again.

Many of the victims were African nationals, particularly from Ghana and Nigeria. In Africa, there is huge pressure to support your family and earn money. The dream of playing football in Europe, and living a wealthy lifestyle, causes trouble for good Samaritans.



One red flag is fake agents. Anyone who claims to be an agent is often not and is just looking to exploit people. Agents are looking for interest and vulnerability, and this is high in Africa.

These fake agents will often linger at training sessions, particularly at young clubs that need money. These clubs need the transfer fees to operate. Most federations in Africa do not have due diligence. Even if they spot a red flag, the small teams will not say anything and instead prioritise the need for money.

**What would you say to a young aspiring football player to raise their awareness of trafficking through sport, and ensure they take the right and safest routes into becoming a professional footballer?**

Everyone has different personalities; some become successful football players, whilst others don't. Although there were better players than me, it was my destiny and I worked hard to do it the right way. You have to enter a football career in the right way, and you must not be deceived by other people's lifestyles.

“  
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”

Education is also important. Many footballers from Africa will not take education seriously and therefore fail to express themselves.

It is important to be able to read your contract and check it's the same as what your agents have promised. No one will offer a translation. People are therefore signing contracts they have not understood.

“  
These fake agents will often linger at training sessions, particularly at young clubs that need money.  
”

I always say to take your lessons seriously. You can rely on education. Take advice from people that know your sport.

People need to understand that not everyone can play football in Europe otherwise there would be no league in Africa.

Everyone wants to play in Europe, so train hard alongside education as football has no guarantees. I would tell them the truth and nothing but the truth

# The work of others: LUMOS



## Introducing the international charity whose report investigates the link between children's institutions and child trafficking

### What does LUMOS do?

Lumos fights for every child's right to a family by transforming care systems around the world. We shed light on the root causes of family separation – poverty, conflict and discrimination – and demonstrate that children can safely be united with families.

### What is the link between orphanage institutions and trafficking?

On average, more than 80% of children in orphanages have living parents. Our report assimilates 18 months of global data looking at this link, and our event will release and feature this report.


### How can someone access your event on this link, as well as your resources?

You can sign up to our event on 13th December below:

**[Register for: Cycles of Exploitation - The Links Between Children's Institutions and Child Trafficking.](#)**

Download the LUMOS strategy for 2021-2023 [here](#).

Download a simple, one-page resource [here](#).



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