

Briefing for the Public Petitions Committee on petition [PE2247](#): Mandate Police Scotland to collect data on nationality, religion, ethnicity, asylum status and instances of gang-based abuse, lodged by Joanna Kerr

Brief overview of issues raised by the petition

The petitioner is calling for Police Scotland to be required “to collect data on nationality, religion, ethnicity, gang-based abuse (abuse involving two or more perpetrators) and asylum status”.

They suggest that such data:

- “would enable cases involving grooming gangs of predominantly Pakistani heritage to be more effectively investigated and prosecuted”,
- “is relevant with regards to other group based child sexual abuse networks involved in trafficking.”

It refers to the petitioner’s previously lodged [petition PE2208](#) calling for the mandatory collection and publication of data on the nationality, ethnicity, immigration status and religion of child sexual offenders.

Background on “gang-based abuse”

The foreword to Baroness Casey’s report on the [National Audit on Group-based Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse](#) commented that the term ‘group-based child sexual exploitation’ is a sanitised version of what it is. Adding that:

“I want to set it out in unsanitised terms: we are talking about multiple sexual assaults committed against children by multiple men on multiple occasions; beatings and gang rapes. Girls having to have abortions, contracting sexually transmitted infections, having children removed from them at birth.”

In response to the national audit, [an independent Inquiry into grooming gangs](#) in England and Wales, was announced in December 2025.

In February 2026, the Scottish Government committed to establishing a Scottish Inquiry (see Scottish Government [news release](#)). This will be led by Professor Alexis Jay, who led the independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse in England and Wales (see further information on this below). The Inquiry will focus on the prevalence of group-based child sexual abuse and exploitation. It will be separate from the work of the [Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry](#) which is investigating the abuse of children in care in Scotland.

Giving [evidence to the Education, Children and Young People Committee](#), on the same day as the announcement (25 February 2026), Professor Jay explained that she does not think the use of the terms ‘grooming’ or ‘gangs’ is accurate and said it is more appropriate to call them ‘networks’:

“... because that term encompasses a much wider range of issues, people and settings. “Gangs” has a certain connotation, and it would be wrong and far too restrictive to think that that is the only way in which the sexual exploitation of children takes place.”

In a Scottish context, potential offences relating to group-based child sexual abuse and exploitation could include:

1. Sexual offences set out in the Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act 2009 (e.g. rape, sexual assault and sexual coercion). There are specific provisions relating to young children (under 13) and older children (under 16).
2. The offence of human trafficking set out in section 1 of the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Scotland) Act 2015 (e.g. where the trafficking relates to prostitution and sexual exploitation).
3. Crimes of violence such as common law assault.

England and Wales recommendations on data collection

Several reports investigating this issue in England and Wales have made recommendations relating to data collection (and ethnicity data in particular).

[The Report of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse](#) (October 2022), chaired by Professor Jay, considered the extent to which institutions in England and Wales have discharged their duty to protect children from sexual abuse. The report said that the scale and extent of child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation are difficult to ascertain as data collection is poor.

The report set out the importance of collecting data on ethnicity in particular:

“Accurate data on the ethnicity of victims and perpetrators play an important part in enhancing understanding of child sexual abuse and the context in which such abuse occurs. The data assist the relevant statutory agencies to target resources appropriately, including, for example, enabling the police to engage with communities where child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation occur. Victims and survivors may require culturally sensitive support from the statutory authorities.” (page 137)

One of the recommendations of the report was for a single set of core data relating to child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation. It recommended that children’s social care and criminal justice agencies should produce “consistent and compatible data” which includes “the characteristics of victims and alleged perpetrators of child sexual abuse, including age, sex and ethnicity” (page 148).

The Inquiry also produced reports on [Child sexual exploitation by organised networks](#) (February 2022) and [Child sexual abuse in ethnic minority communities](#) (June 2020) which consider these issues and include similar statements.

A [National Audit on Group-Based Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse](#), conducted by Baroness Casey of Blackstock (report published June 2025), stated that:

“This audit is the latest in a long line of reports, reviews, recommendations and strategies into child sexual exploitation. All of which say the same things about system failures on information sharing, training and other processes, risk factors for victims and **a need to collect data and information on the perpetrators, including on ethnicity and culture.**” (page 19, emphasis added)

On data collection, in particular, it stated: “National data on the demography of victims and perpetrators is poor [...] Ethnicity is shied away from despite being a question for many years” (page 61). Chapter 4 of the audit report covered this in more detail and concludes:

“Many inquiries and reports have been saying more needs to be done to examine the ethnicity issues associated with group-based child sexual exploitation. It plays into the hands of groups with divisive political agendas not to examine or deal with these issues conclusively. This does everyone a disservice, including Asian and Pakistani communities.

Far more importantly, it is continuing to let down the victims and survivors of such abuse, many of whom have already been failed multiple times by the people who are there to protect them.

Despite the lack of a full picture in the national data sets, there was and is enough evidence available in local police data in three areas which we examined which show disproportionate numbers of suspects from Asian ethnic backgrounds, as well as in the significant number of perpetrators of Asian ethnicity identified in local reviews and child sexual exploitation prosecutions across the country, to warrant further examination. More effort is required to identify the nature of group-based child sexual exploitation and why it appears men of Asian and Pakistani ethnicity are disproportionately represented in some areas, in order to understand it better, and to tackle it more effectively” (page 87).

Recommendation 4 of the audit is: The government should make mandatory the collection of ethnicity and nationality data for all suspects in child sexual abuse and criminal exploitation cases and work with the police to improve the collection of ethnicity data for victims.

The UK Government has published a [response to the audit](#) and in relation to recommendation 4 has committed to making it a requirement for the police to collect ethnicity and nationality data of perpetrators of group-based child sexual exploitation.

Scottish context

The petition refers to the [National Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation Strategic Group](#). This was established by the Scottish Government in 2024 to increase national level coordination and capability to address risks and harms of child sexual abuse and exploitation by scrutinising evidence and practice to agree actions. It considered the National Audit on Group-based Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation report at an [Extraordinary Meeting in July 2025](#).

The petition also refers to the [public inquiry into Scotland's response to group-led child sexual abuse and exploitation](#). In response to a question on the “grooming gangs inquiry” ([18 June 2026](#)), chaired by Professor Jay, the First Minister said:

“... the Government has established its leadership and work is under way to ensure that the terms of reference are finalised and that the inquiry can start its work at the first available opportunity.”

The [Scottish Government's response to petition PE2208](#) (the petitioner's previous petition) points out that an arrested person is not required to disclose their ethnicity, immigration status or religion – see [section 34](#)(4) of the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 2016 which provides:

“The person is under no obligation to answer any question, other than to give the following information—

- a) the person's name,
- b) the person's address,
- c) the person's date of birth,
- d) the person's place of birth (in such detail as a constable considers necessary or expedient for the purpose of establishing the person's identity), and
- e) the person's nationality.”

This indicates that changes to primary legislation may be required to give effect to the petitioner's request. The response to petition PE2208 also states, in respect of nationality (which an arrested person would be obliged to provide under the 2016 Act), that: “Police Scotland has confirmed that in around 50% of the cases the individuals do not have a recognised nationality e.g. the field has either been left blank or it has been filled out using the following information: other, unknown, not stated.”

Key Organisations

- Police Scotland
- Scottish Government

- National Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation Strategic Group (and members of the Group which includes, for example, groups representing children and child protection services)

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28 September 2026

The purpose of this briefing is to provide a brief overview of issues raised by the petition. SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However, if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at spice@parliament.scot

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