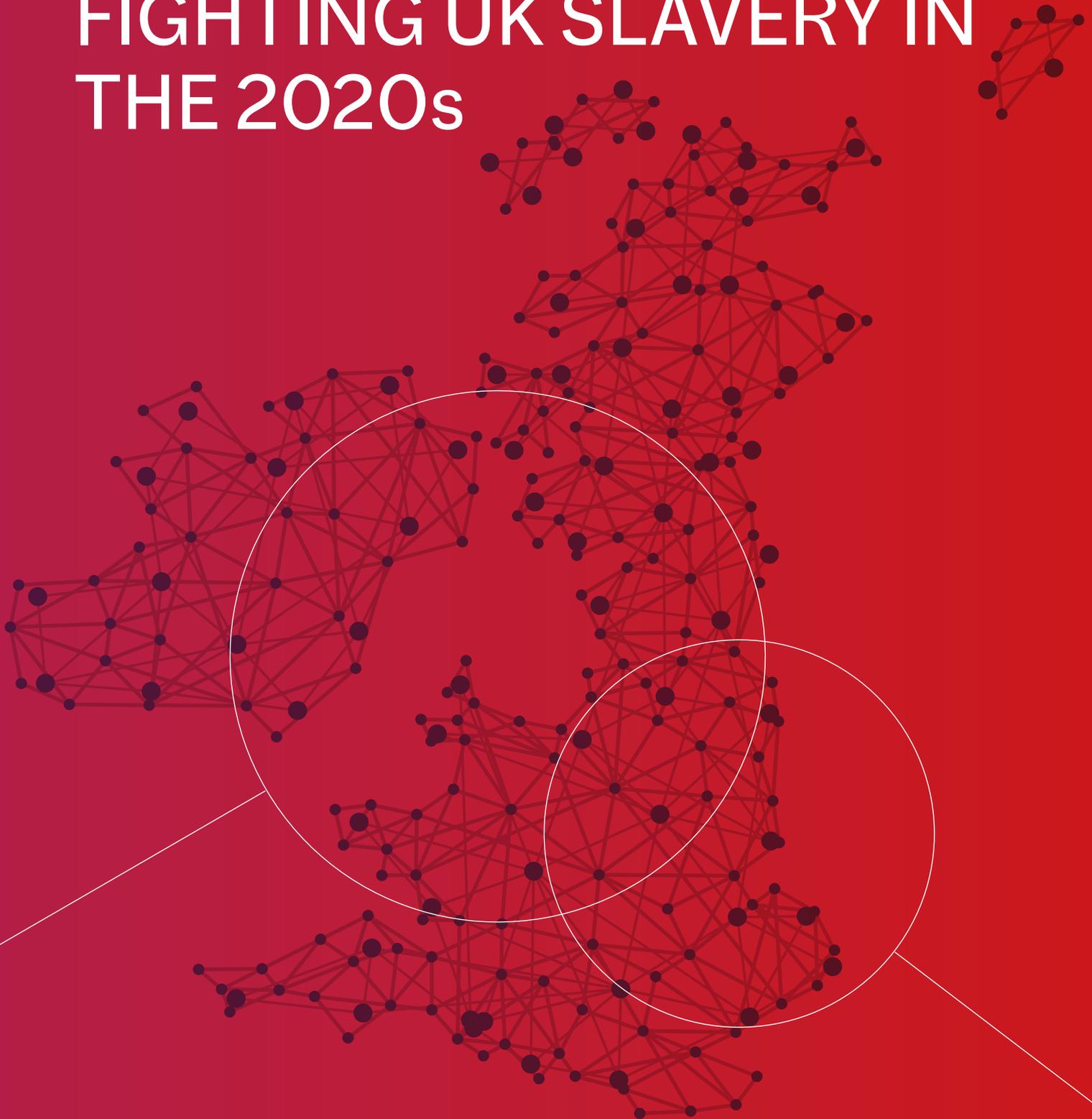


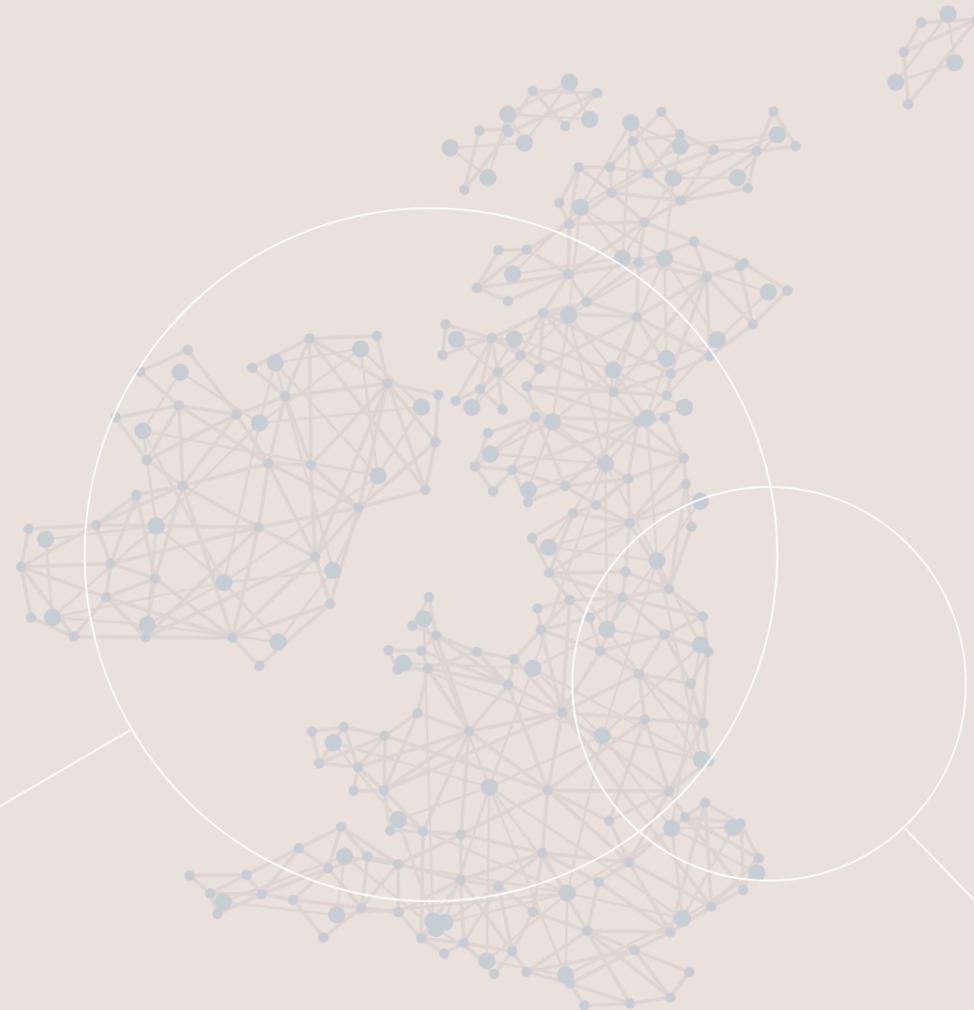
July 2020

IT STILL HAPPENS HERE: FIGHTING UK SLAVERY IN THE 2020s



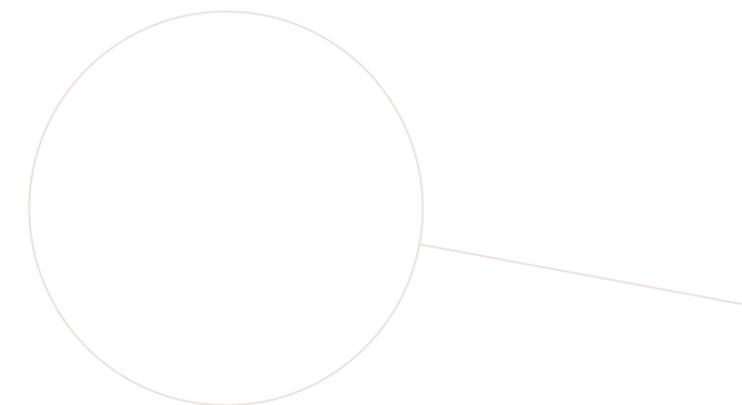
*“Victims of modern slavery, from forced labour to sexual exploitation, have their human rights violated every day and are constantly put in dangerous situations, often through manipulation, coercion and abuse. **Sadly, modern slavery is much more prevalent in communities than is realised. We must rid this evil from every single community across the United Kingdom and give victims the support they need to live safe lives. Ending this exploitation for good must be a priority.**”*

Carolyn Harris, MP for Swansea East



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About

About the Modern Slavery Policy Unit

The Modern Slavery Policy Unit, a joint initiative led by Justice and Care UK and the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), has a core mission – **to keep modern slavery at the top of the British political agenda and ensure the UK fights the crime**. This means better understanding of the nature and scale of modern slavery, increased investment and a sophisticated national response proportionate to the level of threat. Utilising the experience of frontline practitioners, developing creative and evidence-based ideas, fostering a new understanding about the scale of the crime and listening to the voices of survivors, **the Modern Slavery Policy Unit works to catalyse the political leadership needed to achieve systemic change**.

The new Modern Slavery Policy Unit:

1. Advocates for policy and legislation that places victims and their recovery needs at its heart.
2. Bridges the gap between those working to disrupt this crime and support its survivors, and decision makers in Westminster, ensuring that voices from the frontline are heard and heeded.
3. Works on a cross-party basis, bringing together and equipping a strong caucus of parliamentarians to lead the fight against slavery.

About the Report

This report builds on the impact of the CSJ's groundbreaking report 'It Happens Here: Equipping the United Kingdom to fight modern slavery', which led to the passing of the Modern Slavery Act in 2015. It explores the progress that has been made in the UK's response, five years on from the Modern Slavery Act, but also identifies the key challenges faced by frontline professionals who are working to fulfil their duties under the Act.

In a unique undertaking, the first of its kind since the Modern Slavery Act was passed, the Modern Slavery Policy Unit has visited six select areas across England and Wales - Birmingham, Leeds, Swansea, Plymouth, Loughborough and Southend-on-Sea - to hear from a cross-section of frontline professionals including the police, local authorities and charities who have given us invaluable local insights into the reality of modern slavery at the local level. They have shown us how the Modern Slavery Act is working on the ground, both its positive impact and the distinct challenges it poses. We also surveyed police officers and Police and Crime Commissioners to get a better understanding of the impact and challenges at the national level. During our investigations we had the privilege of hearing the stories of survivors of modern slavery; we have included these where possible to illustrate its impact on human lives. We also commissioned a public poll to get a better understanding of the public perception of modern slavery today.

This report is not a review of the Modern Slavery Act; the Act has undergone significant scrutiny in the last five years and by no means do we wish to duplicate the tremendous analytical work that has gone in to gauge how it is working. We welcome the recommendations of the 2019 Independent Review of the Modern Slavery Act and are looking forward to seeing the recommendations of this review implemented in line with the Government's response.

Foreword

Most people find it hard to believe that, nearly two hundred years after Britain formally abolished slavery, the terrible crime of holding another human being enslaved is still widespread here. That is because modern slavery is hidden from view, even though it is all around us. Across our country, large numbers of young women have been forced into sexual slavery. Thousands of young men struggling with debt are drawn into forced labour from which they cannot escape. Hundreds of children are growing up never experiencing the freedom the rest of us enjoy. If anyone still doubts the reality of modern slavery, they need to read the harrowing case studies set out in this compelling report – just a few examples of a continuing and unacceptable tragedy.

If this situation was not bleak enough, the Covid-19 crisis is set to make matters worse, intensifying the poverty, lack of opportunities and distraction of society by other issues on which slavery thrives. In these pages we can see very clearly that there are still few prosecutions relative to the scale of the problem. We learn that the true number of people in twenty-first century slavery in the UK might be in excess of 100,000. No civilised country can allow this to continue, let alone deteriorate further.

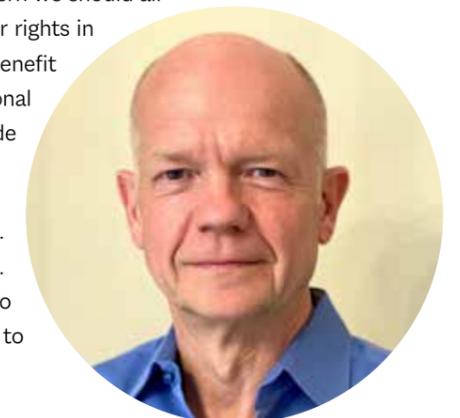
The Modern Slavery Act 2015 was a landmark piece of legislation, much influenced by the work of the Centre for Social Justice, and provides the framework for intensifying our efforts in the years to come. If we are to vanquish this seemingly permanent blight on our society, the Government will need to build on this ground-breaking Act, emulating the reforming zeal displayed on this issue by Theresa May in her time as Home Secretary and Prime Minister.

This report, by the Modern Slavery Policy Unit, sets out very clearly why that should happen and how it can. Based on extensive work with frontline practitioners, local authorities and police forces, it combines powerful insights into the scale and nature of modern slavery with a clear agenda for what needs to be done next. It finds that a growing number of British citizens suffer trafficking and exploitation alongside so many victims from abroad. It reveals that human traffickers and organised crime groups are operating with impunity in many communities. And it goes on to make a persuasive case for eight recommendations on how to strengthen our fight against such large-scale criminal abuse of vulnerable people.

Those recommendations form the agenda for all who share the intense concern we should all feel that such events can still take place. They range from enshrining survivor rights in law, to transforming police engagement with victims and tackling widespread benefit fraud. The need to tighten key aspects of the 2015 Act and prioritise international co-ordination is well made. Working with other countries to stamp out the trade in people must be a top priority of a globally-engaged Britain.

I pay tribute to the authors of this report for the professionalism of their work. It contains important findings for all of us, from ministers to the public at large. Today, we look back with some pride on campaigners in previous centuries who ended the barbarities of the transatlantic slave trade. If future generations are to regard us in anything like the same light, we still have much work to do.

Lord Hague of Richmond



Acknowledgements

The Head of the Modern Slavery Policy Unit, Tatiana Gren-Jardan, who authored this report, would like to thank the many people and organisations who kindly gave their time to contribute evidence during the course of this review.

First, we would like to extend our thanks to the frontline practitioners across the country who shared their experiences, achievements, challenges, concerns and victims' stories.

In Leeds, we thank Leeds City Council, the Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Team of West Yorkshire Police, West Yorkshire Trading Standards and Palm Cove Society.

In Birmingham, we are grateful to the Modern Slavery Coordinator at Birmingham City Council, the Modern Slavery Coordinator at Sandwell Council, the Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Team of West Midlands Police, The Jericho Foundation, Adavu Project, The Safe Places Project, and the Modern Slavery Community Service Manager at Black Country Women's Aid.

In Swansea, we wish to thank Swansea Council, South Wales Police, the Welsh Anti-Slavery Coordinator, the Modern Slavery MARAC Coordinator, Swansea Women's Aid and Bawso.

In Plymouth, we thank Plymouth City Council, Devon and Cornwall Police, Trevi House, Shekinah and The Liberty Project of the Bournemouth Churches Housing Association.

In Loughborough, we are grateful to the Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Team of Leicestershire police, Charnwood Borough Council, The Bridge, The Baca Charity and The Falcon Centre.

In Southend-on-Sea, we thank Southend-on-Sea Borough Council, the Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Team of Essex Police, Prevent and Protect Modern Slavery & Human Trafficking Coordinators of the Serious Crime Directorate at Kent and Essex Police, Southend Community Policing Team, Justice and Care UK, Southend Against Modern Slavery Partnership and Southend Vineyard.

We wish to give our special thanks to Mark Burns-Williamson OBE, the Police and Crime Commissioner for West Yorkshire Police and the APCC Lead on Modern Slavery, for contributing to this report and for helping to share our bespoke survey with Police and Crime Commissioners across the country. **We also thank Chief Constable Shaun Sawyer**, the NPCC Lead on Modern Slavery, and his team for disseminating this survey to police forces across England and Wales. Your support was invaluable in allowing us to gain extensive insight.

We extend our gratitude to MPs across our research locations for supporting this work. We would like to thank our Special Advisor and editor, Lucy Colman, for her contribution to this report.

Voices from Parliament

"In October 2019 the nation was shocked when 39 people were found dead in the back of a trailer in West Thurrock. The truth is that people are being trafficked into our country every day - seduced by criminal gangs who ruthlessly exploit their dreams and bind them over to slave labour. We can all play our part in fighting this menace. It is all around us: in car washes, nail bars, restaurants, brothels, cannabis farms, and people's homes. We need a cross-Government approach to fighting this with the Police and HMRC tackling this together. But we should all be vigilant, report any suspicion we may have; and we can always wash our own cars."

Jackie Doyle-Price, MP for Thurrock

"Modern slavery has no place in our society. Whilst there have been limited instances in Plymouth, the fact there have been any is unacceptable. The Modern Slavery Act 2015 and the 2017 Call to Action to end modern slavery and human trafficking are a strong start and evidence of this Government's commitment to tackling this problem. And yet this is a global problem which needs world leaders to continue to approach it in a cohesive, collaborative way."

Johnny Mercer, MP for Plymouth Moor View

"Modern slavery is an abhorrent crime, often hitting the most vulnerable in our society; immigrants, women, children, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities and mental health issues, those struggling the most to get a job. Modern slaves have invisible chains tying them to criminal organisations, which maximise their illegal profits by denying basic employment rights. This report sheds a light on this serious issue, providing vital insight on an area characterised by lack of data and many victims slipping under the radar. It is vital that, along with contrasting this horrible crime, we work to offer victims adequate support to their complex needs, so we can fully break the chain of exploitation."

Andrea Jenkyns, MP for Morley and Outwood

"Thousands of people around the globe are suffering, and yet their plights are not known. They are victims of modern slavery; forced against their will to do things they don't want to do. But modern slavery comes in many forms, so I welcome the research being undertaken by the Modern Slavery Policy Unit to examine the reality of modern slavery. I am also pleased that the Unit is hearing contributions from some great organisations in Loughborough who are already doing some wonderful work to tackle modern slavery in all its forms."

Jane Hunt, MP for Loughborough

Executive Summary

Five years ago, Britain passed landmark legislation to step up its fight against modern slavery. The Modern Slavery Act 2015 was groundbreaking in the way it defined and consolidated modern slavery crimes, increased sentences for perpetrators, made provisions for the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner and demanded that businesses address the risk of slavery in their supply chains. It set a global precedent and countries around the world followed suit. This legislation undoubtedly marked a leap forward in Britain's anti-slavery movement and has had a significant impact across the UK.

However, in the years since this law was passed, political leadership has waned. **As the problem of modern slavery grows in this country, there is a risk that the Modern Slavery Act has lured us into a false sense of security.** Far from being finished, the work is only just beginning.

There is a serious risk that the crisis triggered by COVID-19 will lead to a rise in modern slavery and human trafficking. The main drivers of modern slavery – poverty, lack of opportunity and other vulnerabilities – will intensify, resulting in an increased risk of exploitation and abuse. Millions of people will be driven into desperation to meet their basic needs and to provide for their families, which will ultimately increase the risk of exploitation. As the pandemic continues, it is crucial that the increased risks of modern slavery are addressed. Concerted and coordinated action from the Government, in partnership with the voluntary sector, is now more urgent than ever.

Key findings

- Many thousands of children, women and men of all nationalities and backgrounds - including a growing number of British citizens - continue to be trafficked and exploited for profit by ruthless criminal networks. They are tricked, taken and coerced into sexual slavery, crime, hard labour and domestic servitude. Forced addictions are increasingly used as methods of control.
- Nobody knows the true scale and cost of the crime, but based on a new police data analysis tool we believe **there could be at least 100,000 victims in the UK, with the actual number likely to be even greater.** According to a 2017 Government study, the economic and social cost of modern slavery was £3.3 billion – £4.3 billion, but this was based on their estimated prevalence of only 10,000 – 13,000 suspected victims. It is time for the Government to update its national assessment of the size of this problem, and the cost to the taxpayer.
- Our understanding of slavery and how to fight it must improve on the frontline if we are to tackle it. A 'local lottery' exists when it comes to prioritising the anti-slavery fight across public authorities, and the response often remains reliant on personal leadership rather than it being core business.
- Human traffickers and Organised Crime Groups are running riot in too many communities. Very few face prosecution relative to the number of victims found and even fewer are convicted. As the number of victims discovered has skyrocketed in the last five years, convictions have barely increased. In the year ending March 2019 there were 322 completed prosecutions for modern slavery-related crimes and 219 convictions served. During the same period, 7,525 adults and children were identified as potential victims of modern slavery.

- The UK's immediate and longer-term response to victims is not up to standard - especially because we lose vital intelligence and evidence when victims disengage or are re-trafficked. We can no longer afford half-baked care and support. There is a serious backlog of cases within the National Referral Mechanism (NRM). Victims often spend months or years in limbo until a decision is made; 80 per cent of people referred to the NRM in 2019 were still waiting for a decision at the end of December 2019 (8,429 cases).
- The British public can play a unique role in the fight against trafficking by reporting concerns to the police, but almost 60 per cent of people do not know who to tell when they spot the signs. Public awareness has improved though, with 63 per cent saying they are more aware of slavery than they were five years ago. 68 per cent say fighting modern slavery should be a top political priority.

These findings show that frontline agencies are only just getting started in the fight against modern slavery. They are in desperate need of guidance, resources, leadership and, crucially, data on the scale of the problem.

Five years on from the Modern Slavery Act, the exploitation and abuse of vulnerable people is far too easy, with criminals still operating at low risk in many communities. Fighting modern slavery is complex and challenging, but by no means is it impossible. With the right strategy and proportionate resources backed up by a sense of urgency from Westminster, we can ensure an all-out assault on this vile crime.

This report calls the Government to action now, focusing on the following key principles for reform:

- To fight the problem adequately we have to understand its true scale and invest accordingly.
- Good care and support for the exploited is not a luxury extra or just the right thing to do - it bolsters the fight against organised crime because victims are a vital source of intelligence.
- Charities can play a more strategic role in partnering with police. This is a largely untapped resource.
- Bringing more slave masters and Organised Crime Groups to justice is essential if we are to tackle this crime. At the moment modern slavery is a low risk, high reward crime. This has to change.
- More foreign national victims can be helped to return home safely, if they wish to do so, whilst maintaining contact with criminal investigations.
- As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, prevention is crucial to ensure modern slavery is not allowed to flourish.



Summary of recommendations to strengthen the UK's fight against slavery



- 1. We need to update our understanding of the scale and nature of modern slavery and human trafficking in the UK.** The new police data analytical tool showcased in this report should be scaled up and commissioned to publish an annual national prevalence assessment. This should inform operational and strategic responses and ensure proportionate investment from the Government. More political focus is also required: the Government must produce a new cross-departmental modern slavery strategy setting out clear responsibilities, actions and outcomes for tackling this crime. The high-level Task Force once chaired by the former Prime Minister needs to be revived to spearhead a cross-Government response. Mandatory training should be introduced to ensure public authorities are living up to their duties under the Modern Slavery Act.
- 2. The Government must enshrine survivor rights in law to guarantee and protect their access to support.** This should be done by finally passing the Modern Slavery (Victim Support) Bill 2019 – 2021, which would give victims in England and Wales a guaranteed right to support during the initial period when the NRM decision is being made, and for a further minimum of 12 months afterwards. We also call on the Government to consider further support at that point, akin to the US-style 'Trafficking in Persons' visa which offers temporary leave to remain where a victim is assisting as a witness in a criminal investigation. Other reforms should include localising the NRM decision-making process and fast-tracking Government-to-Government safe return and reintegration schemes to allow more victims to return home quickly and safely when they wish to. The Home Office Assisted Voluntary Return scheme needs strengthening when it comes to slavery victims, moving from cash payments that increase vulnerability or go to waste, to targeted spend aiding recovery and avoiding re-trafficking.
- 3. Police engagement with victims needs to be transformed to dismantle criminal networks and bring more traffickers to justice.** This should include piloting promising police and NGO partnership models such as the Justice and Care Victim Navigator, providing wraparound support to victims and securing police engagement. Specialist training for investigating officers, prosecutors and judges should be increased, as should training for a wider cohort of agencies such as the CPS and judiciary, with a focus on victim engagement. It is also time for the Government to consider whether additional safeguarding options should be made available to police officers, social services and UK Border Force personnel to remove potential victims from situations of exploitation for their own safety, for a limited period of time. This could divert them from harm and enable the gathering of intelligence about suspected exploiters. This is an issue raised regularly on the frontline and it has been flagged repeatedly by other research, including the 2016 Modern Slavery Act Review led by Caroline Haughey OBE QC.
- 4. We need to understand what is happening to the growing number of Britons being enslaved.** An urgent inquiry should be launched into the increasing exploitation of British citizens, to gain a better understanding about how they fall victim to traffickers and how they can access the support they are entitled to. This inquiry must also consider earlier intervention to break

the cycle of abuse. As a first and urgent step, we are calling for the Government to remove the 'local connection' rules for victims of modern slavery who need to be moved across local authority boundaries to escape their situation of abuse and exploitation and be housed safely.

- 5. Criminals are taking advantage of the Modern Slavery Act.** This must stop. A far more robust early assessment tool and guidance for investigating officers, prosecutors and judiciary must be developed to prevent the abuse of the Statutory Defence in the legislation. The non-prosecution of victims is an important principle in law, but it currently undermines confidence in the legislation.
- 6. Benefit fraud linked to modern slavery must be disrupted.** The Department for Work and Pensions must develop more robust measures to identify cases of modern slavery and work in partnership with other law enforcement agencies to uncover criminal activity. Measures should include, but not be limited to, mandatory training for Jobcentre work coaches, who are often the first to encounter a potential victim, as well as the development of a flag system for modern slavery indicators on the DWP database.
- 7. Section 54 of the Act (Transparency in Supply Chains) should be tightened, as the impact on supply chain transparency has been limited so far.** The Government must introduce measures to increase compliance with Section 54, as well as effective ways to scrutinise and hold to account companies that fail to tackle slavery in their supply chains. This is particularly important in order to prevent an increase in labour exploitation in the aftermath of COVID-19, as companies rush to recoup their losses. Furthermore, the Home Office must now publish its report following the Transparency in Supply Chains consultation held in July – September 2019. It is long overdue.
- 8. The Government should prioritise international action and coordination to dismantle criminal networks, support recovery and prevent trafficking in the first place.** Post-Brexit, innovative European partnerships for information-sharing and cross-border investigations for the purposes of pursuing and convicting traffickers are vital. We cannot allow political tensions to prevent action against organised crime, though we must challenge the European Union to fight this crime with even greater vigour and focus. Modern slavery must remain a top priority for the UK's overseas aid and development budget, targeting key source countries for the UK and global hotspots and with a special focus on addressing underlying vulnerabilities to modern slavery exacerbated by COVID-19. The soft power of overseas aid should be exerted, particularly in post-Brexit trade talks, to move key countries forward, as happens with the US Government's annual Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report.



PART I: MODERN SLAVERY IN FOCUS

John's Story

John, a 61-year-old British man, is currently living in Leeds in his own accommodation and is receiving Universal Credit. But his journey to this point was long.

John was a slave for 15 years. He survived years of brutal forced labour and financial exploitation with the threat of extreme violence, regular beatings and emotional abuse.

John had lost his parents and was homeless, living in night shelters and relying on food banks in Birmingham when he was approached by his slave masters – the Rooney family.

When John arrived at his destination – a travellers' site in Lincolnshire – he was put in a small and dirty caravan. The caravan's windows were smashed and there was no toilet, running water or heating. He was provided with scraps of leftover food and given cheap cider by his slave masters. This resulted in an alcohol dependency, which became a means of control.

Seven days a week, John was forced to do physical tasks around the caravan site, wash the vehicles when they had returned from a day's work and walk the dogs. If John was not working fast enough, he would be hit and punched around the head, often with a shovel. Numerous vehicles were purchased in his name and used for illegal purposes. Housing benefit was applied for in John's name for properties that were used to grow cannabis. His income support and disability benefit were kept from him and his bank cards were taken by the traffickers. John was sometimes provided with five pounds and a packet of tobacco as payment for his work.

John and 17 other men were rescued by the police in September 2014 as part of a major investigation. John was referred to the National Referral Mechanism and received support from the Palm Cove Society under the Victim Care Contract run by the Salvation Army. Upon John's arrival to the Palm Cove Society he was provided with his own room with fresh bedding, a welcome pack including toiletries and a food parcel. He was registered with a GP and received a fortnightly prescription to address his medical needs. Immediately it became clear that John had a learning disability and he was referred to the Local Authority Social Services.

John was accompanied by his support worker to provide statements to the police. He was an important witness during the police investigation, which resulted in a conviction of nine perpetrators who received a total of 79 years in prison. In 2018, a further member of the Rooney family was convicted and sentenced to 11 years.

In March 2016, John was moved to his new independent accommodation, but he maintained contact with the Palm Cove Society as he was still vulnerable and needed continuous support. In September 2018 John was referred into the Pathways project at the Palm Cove Society and engaged well.¹ He attended the drop-in service almost every week and would have regular contact with his support worker. In 2019 John was befriended by a young woman who started exploiting him by stealing money and items from his flat and demanding money for drugs. John told his support worker, who notified the police. The woman was subsequently arrested and received a three-year prison sentence.

¹ A pilot project funded by the Government to test new approaches to longer-term support. See Part II for further details.

The Modern Slavery Act 2015: Five years on

In March 2015 the Modern Slavery Act was introduced in England and Wales as a landmark piece of legislation that provided law enforcement agencies with tools to fight modern slavery, and enhanced protection for victims.

The Modern Slavery Act 2015:

- Consolidated and simplified existing offences into a single act.
- Introduced severe punishments for modern slavery crimes, including life sentences.
- Introduced slavery and trafficking prevention and protection orders.
- Created an Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner to improve and better coordinate the national response to modern slavery.
- Introduced a statutory defence for victims of slavery and trafficking, designed to protect them from prosecution for crimes they were forced to commit when they were enslaved.
- Placed a duty on the Secretary of State to produce statutory guidance for public authorities on how to identify and support victims of modern slavery.
- Made provision for Independent Child Trafficking Advocates to support all trafficked children.
- Introduced a new reparation order to enable courts to confiscate assets from perpetrators and compensate victims for the harm inflicted upon them as a result of exploitation.
- Enabled law enforcement to stop ships where slaves are suspected of being held or trafficked.
- Required businesses with a turnover of more than £36 million to publish annual modern slavery statements disclosing what action they have taken to ensure there is no slavery in their supply chains.

Reviews and scrutiny since 2015

A year on from the enactment of the Modern Slavery Act, the then Prime Minister Theresa May commissioned Caroline Haughey QC OBE to review its impact. The final report concluded that the Act had set an international benchmark for tackling modern slavery, and that law enforcement agencies were starting to use its powers to increase prosecutions and support more victims. However, it also stated that there was a lack of consistency of responses across police forces and better training, better intelligence and a more structured approach was needed to identify, investigate, prosecute and prevent slavery.² Following the publication of the review, the Home Secretary announced an £8.5 million investment through the Police Transformation Fund to help strengthen the police's response to modern slavery.³

In April 2017 the Work and Pensions Select Committee chaired by Frank Field MP published a report following its inquiry into the support provided to victims of modern slavery. It concluded

that there was a lack of awareness, training and coordination in frontline services leading to an 'inexcusable lack of support' for victims of modern slavery. One of the key findings stated 'the lack of awareness, training and understanding, and lack of proper support for victims is having a negative impact on the number of successful prosecutions of slave masters.' It called for an 'urgent review' to ensure some minimum safeguards for victims were in place.⁴

Subsequent reports including from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services, the National Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee drew similar conclusions about a lack of significant improvements to the country's response to modern slavery. The NAO stated that 'the Home Office has an incomplete picture of the crime, the victims and the perpetrators. Accountability within the modern slavery strategy is unclear, oversight of victim support is inadequate and few cases have led to prosecution'.⁵

In July 2018 an Independent Review of the Modern Slavery Act was commissioned by the Government. The Review's May 2019 report produced an extensive list of 80 recommendations on how to improve the application of the Act. The Government published its detailed response to the review in July 2019, accepting many of the recommendations and admitting that some recommendations would need further consultation.⁶

In July 2018 the Home Affairs Select Committee, chaired by Yvette Cooper MP, launched a wide-ranging inquiry looking into what progress has been made since the Act came into force and what remains to be done. Important written and oral evidence was submitted and heard by the Committee. However due to the General Election held on 12 December 2019 the inquiry was closed before a final report was published.⁷

The Government published Statutory Guidance on how to identify and support victims of slavery under Section 49 of the Modern Slavery Act on 24 March 2020.⁸ The impact of this guidance has yet to be seen.

On 26 March, to coincide with the fifth anniversary of the Modern Slavery Act, the Government published its first Modern Slavery Statement in line with the provisions of the Transparency in Supply Chains clause of the Modern Slavery Act.⁹ It is the first Government in the world to make a statement of this kind.

2 Modern Slavery Act 2015 review: one year on by Caroline Haughey QC OBE, July 2016 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/modern-slavery-act-2015-review-one-year-on>

3 Home Secretary strengthens police response to modern slavery, the Home Office news release, October 2016 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/home-secretary-strengthens-police-response-to-modern-slavery>

4 Work and Pensions Select Committee's inquiry into victims of modern slavery, April 2017 <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/work-and-pensions-committee/inquiries/parliament-2015/victims-of-modern-slavery-16-17/>

5 'Reducing Modern Slavery', National Audit Office, December 2017 <https://www.nao.org.uk/report/reducing-modern-slavery/>

6 Government's response to the independent review of the Modern Slavery Act 2015, July 2019

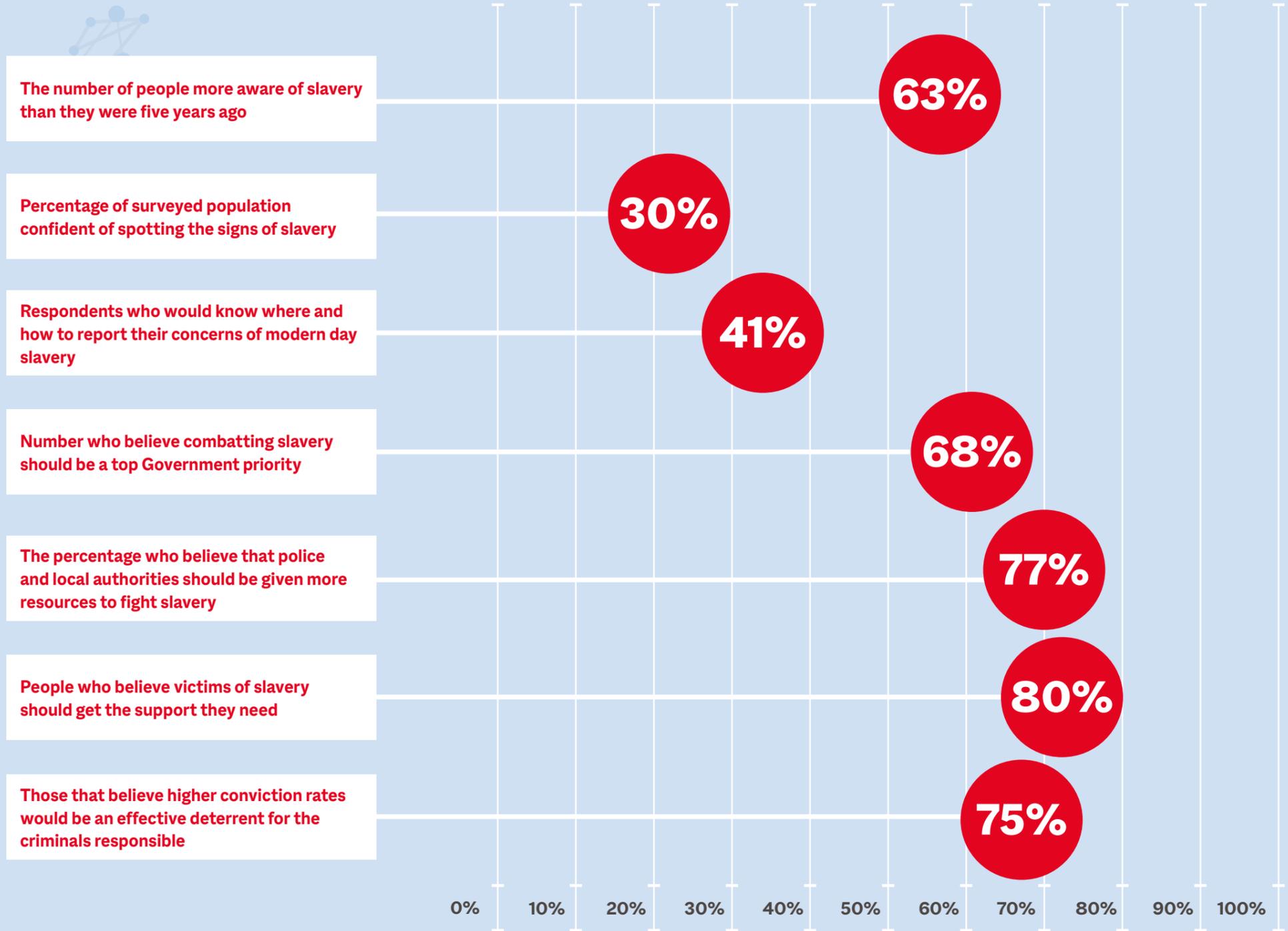
7 Home Affairs Select Committee Modern Slavery inquiry <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/home-affairs-committee/inquiries/parliament-2017/modern-slavery-inquiry-17-19/>

8 Statutory Guidance on how to identify and support victims of modern slavery in England and Wales, March 2020 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/modern-slavery-how-to-identify-and-support-victims>

9 UK Government modern slavery statement, March 2020 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-government-modern-slavery-statement>

What the public say

As part of our research, we commissioned Savanta ComRes to undertake an exclusive representative poll of more than 2,000 people to understand their attitudes to modern slavery in the UK. The findings demonstrate that modern slavery is an important issue for the British public, who have the ability to help fight the crime at a local level by spotting and reporting the signs.



Based on a survey of 2,005 adults by Comres Global.

A complex, hidden and serious crime

In November 2016 modern slavery was adopted as a national priority for intelligence collection for police forces and was subsequently made a national high-priority threat in March 2017.⁹ In its National Strategic Assessment of Serious and Organised Crime, the National Crime Agency once again reiterated that tackling modern slavery and human trafficking as a serious and organised crime remains a priority in 2020.¹⁰ However, the true scale and nature of modern slavery in Britain remains unclear. Figures rely heavily on the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) statistics, but as this report will show, these figures do not reflect the reality of modern slavery in the UK.

In 2013 the Home Office estimated that there could be anywhere between 10,000-13,000 potential victims of modern slavery in the UK. The Walk Free Foundation's Global Slavery Index in 2018 estimated that there could be as many as 136,000 people enslaved in the UK. In her Strategic Plan 2019 - 2021, the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, Dame Sara Thornton DBE QPM stated that *"such a difference in estimates undermines the ability of government to deliver an appropriate response"* and encouraged more research to reassess the prevalence and ensure policy and practice is informed by accurate data.¹¹

During our research across the country, we heard the same story from frontline workers who are hindered by the foggy national picture and the lack of reliable data. Several reasons explain this incomplete national picture, including the complex and hidden nature of modern slavery and the fact it is often interwoven with other crimes. There is also a serious lack in the technological ability to track it effectively.

Modern slavery: A local snapshot

"Modern slavery is very real and victims and perpetrators live in our communities. It is often hidden from public view and can go unreported."

Southend Community Policing Team

Despite its limitations, discussed in this report, the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) statistics represent the main set of data informing our understanding of what modern slavery looks like in the UK. Since NRM records began in 2009, the number of potential victims identified and referred for support has been growing year on year with a total of 10,627 potential victims identified in 2019, a 52 per cent increase from 2018.¹² Men, women and children from more than 130 countries across the world have been trafficked and exploited in the UK. However, in the last three years the UK has been the top country of origin of suspected slavery victims. Traffickers abuse and exploit their victims in a multitude of forms, with most common types of exploitation being labour exploitation, sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation and domestic servitude.

During our visits and in response to questionnaires, police officers, local authorities and charities all told us that the true scale of modern slavery is unknown. Across the six areas we visited, we heard countless stories of the many and varied ways that vulnerable people are being exploited

and enslaved. This painted a picture of a multi-faceted crime which is difficult to investigate, with victims who are in dire need of support.

In one area we were told of modern slavery victims being 'paid' with alcohol or given drugs to control and coerce them into further exploitation. In Southend we were told by grassroots charities working with vulnerable communities that they do come across people facing exploitation but struggle to connect them with the right support.

"We do not have the data to understand how big modern slavery is in our area. Anecdotally, we know it is a problem. We receive reports of vulnerable men with mental health and addiction issues being exploited for labour and women who are sexually exploited in brothels and massage parlours. Homeless and rough sleeping people who use our services tell us that they are being approached and offered rogue employment."

Southend Against Modern Slavery Partnership coordinator

The Prevent and Protect Team of the Serious Crime Directorate in Kent and Essex Police reported to us that they receive intelligence about many different forms of exploitation, such as the forced begging of those who are homeless and rough sleeping.

"Modern slavery is not just happening in hand car washes, nail bars and cannabis farms. It is much more widespread and we need to proactively look for it. Understanding the depth of this problem, and understanding all of our responsibilities to that problem as a society, is still lacking."

Prevent and Protect Modern Slavery Coordinators, Serious Crime Directorate, Kent and Essex Police

We heard that benefit fraud continues to be a recurring issue in cases of exploitation of both British and Eastern European men and women. Traffickers are known to use the identity of their victims to create multiple bank accounts that they then control. They force victims to commit petty crime, theft and benefit fraud. Most recently, in Birmingham, the DWP discovered a huge case of Universal Credit fraud by a Romanian criminal gang who presented at Job Centres with false papers claiming thousands of pounds a week. If the application for Universal Credit was refused by Job Centre staff, the suspected traffickers would return and threaten staff. In this case, what seemed like simply benefit fraud had a much darker reality underpinning it. It is crucial that benefit fraud is acknowledged as a key means by which to launch investigations into human trafficking, as happened in the West Midlands:



⁹ 'Stolen freedom: the policing response to modern slavery and human trafficking' HMICFRS, October 2017 <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/publications/stolen-freedom-the-policing-response-to-modern-slavery-and-human-trafficking/>

¹⁰ National Strategic Assessment of Serious and Organised Crime 2020, NCA <https://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/news/nsa2020>

¹¹ Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner's Strategic Plan 2019-2021, October 2019 <https://www.antislaverycommissioner.co.uk/media/1329/independent-anti-slavery-commissioners-strategic-plan-19-21-screen-readable.pdf>

¹² National Referral Mechanism statistics UK: End of the Year Summary 2019, Home Office, April 2020 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/national-referral-mechanism-statistics-uk-end-of-year-summary-2019>



“We identified numerous benefit frauds in Operation Fort. Nearly all victims had benefits claimed by the traffickers and paid into bank accounts they had no control over. In one case, we found that a telephone number associated with a member of the Organised Criminal Group had called the DWP over 70 times. When we made enquiries, each of these calls related to a separate benefit claim for individuals, some of whom were known victims but most of whom were not known to us.”

Superintendent Nick Dale, West Midlands Police

During our visits we also heard that sexual exploitation is becoming increasingly more complex to detect and investigate, with traffickers changing their tactics. In Birmingham we were told that the use of pop-up brothels is common, particularly when the case involves Romanian nationals. Many of the women in these brothels will be exploited but, because they are escaping grinding poverty at home, they are prepared to tolerate horrendous conditions.

“Criminals are wise with their tactics. They don’t restrict freedom of movement of victims and don’t take their documents away. They use emotional and psychological coercion which is very difficult to prove unless victims engage. We are heavily reliant on the victims engaging and are lucky to have the Victim Navigator to take care of this for us.”¹⁹

Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Unit, Essex Police

For many in this situation, police told us, the greatest challenge is that they do not see themselves as victims of a serious crime. We heard that this is particularly the case with women from China. In Plymouth, police officers told us about a case of sexual exploitation of Chinese nationals. Concerns were raised by a man who received a massage, but was also offered sexual services. He reported this instance to the police.

“It looks like there are some premises that are linked together. Women are moved around these premises and it is difficult to track them. We believe that women are not seeing themselves as victims because they are receiving some money, so we are expecting them to be hostile and refuse to engage with the police.”

Police officer, Devon and Cornwall (Plymouth) police

We heard this same story repeated across our visits. Justice and Care Victim Navigators¹³ also report similar issues, whereby victims are unable or unwilling to acknowledge the reality of the abuse they are facing, and refuse to leave situations of brutal exploitation. This often means police and other frontline workers are forced to leave victims in dangerous situations because they have no clear rights or powers to bring them to safety. In one case for example, we were told that a police officer, desperate to ensure a victim came to no further harm, had to stage a ‘fake arrest’ of the victim in order to remove them from their enslavement. In another area we witnessed first-hand a victim who, when still in the presence of her traffickers, told police all was well. As soon as she was removed to a place of safety, however, she disclosed the extent of her abuse. Victims will only tell their story when they feel safe, but too often we have been told of victims being left to languish in situations of modern slavery because police and others cannot convince them to leave.

It is time for the Government to open up a conversation about what additional safeguarding powers could be made available to police officers and other frontline workers to help them ensure victims are safe and not subjected to further exploitation.

Our visits reiterated the varied and complex nature of modern slavery. They demonstrated the fact that modern slavery presents in many forms, contributing to the challenge of mapping its scale and developing a strategy to fight it.

Modern slavery and other crimes

We heard from numerous frontline professionals that modern slavery often dovetails with other forms of criminality, making it very difficult to measure. We found a stark example of this issue in Leeds.

As part of our research we met with the West Yorkshire Trading Standards team, who have found evidence of organised criminality where trade in illicit tobacco is a front for human trafficking and modern slavery.¹⁴ The business model often involves trafficking vulnerable people from Eastern Europe or the Middle East and subjecting them to debt-bondage, often housing them in converted garages. Male victims are often put to work in the shops, selling illicit tobacco, while female victims are sexually exploited in brothels and subjected to violence and intimidation. These victims are often moved around shop premises to avoid detection, paid small amounts and controlled by the criminal gangs. Children are also used to move supplies around. There is enough evidence to suggest links to other types of organised criminality including drugs, firearms and burglaries.

“More and more the team is finding evidence of organised criminality, where the ‘front door’ is illicit tobacco sales but behind that is a more sinister business of people trafficking and modern slavery. By example, we have an ongoing case which began with a significant seizure of cigarettes from an off licence. Further investigations revealed that the premises had over 70 people registered as living there in two years, and we have uncovered serious organised people trafficking evidence to suggest individuals are being housed illegally, transported around the county to work in premises owned by those involved, with sexual exploitation clearly taking place, and safeguarding issues. This would not have been detected had it not been for the work of the Trading Standards team tackling the tobacco trade. They were under the radar of all enforcement and other agencies, but we now have a multi-agency investigation running to tackle the human trafficking and modern slavery issues.”

Excerpt from a letter sent to Rachel Reeves MP for Leeds West from West Yorkshire Trading Standards

¹³ Victim Navigator is a specialist NGO staff embedded within senior policing teams to broker support and act as a trusted bridge between victims of modern slavery and police investigations

¹⁴ West Yorkshire Trading Standards has an investigation team that tackles the supply of cheap and illicit tobacco (CIT) across the County, which is part funded by the 5 West Yorkshire Public Health teams. Alongside using its enforcement powers, the team undertakes disruption activities, often in the form of multi-agency operations, collaborating with West Yorkshire Police, HMRC, Border Force, Immigration Services, Licensing teams, Environmental Health, children’s and adult protection teams.

Once again, the impact of this kind of complex crime on the understanding of the scale of modern slavery in Leeds, and across the country, is significant. According to a representative from West Yorkshire Trading Standards:

“There could be as many as 500 similar shops in Leeds alone. Modern slavery must be on the radar. It could be much bigger than exploitation and slavery in hand car washes and nail bars.”

Trading Standards Manager, West Yorkshire Trading Standards

Over and over again the evidence we heard during our visits demonstrated the problem that the true nature and scale of modern slavery is unknown, particularly when it comes to links with other organised crime. The Intelligence Unit at the Serious Organised Directorate of the Essex Police suggested to us that modern slavery could be as widespread as importing Class A drugs:

“Organised Criminal Groups that used to smuggle drugs and alcohol, are now smuggling and exploiting vulnerable migrants, because it is considered to be a much lower risk. A journey from Vietnam would cost a migrant anywhere from £10,000 – £35,000, is highly organised, all managed via social media channels. The most common destinations where these trafficked individuals will end up and be exploited are nail bars and the sex trade for women, and growing cannabis for men.”

Intelligence Unit, Serious Crime Directorate, Essex Police

It is clear that until we get a better grip on the size of the problem and the ways in which modern slavery links to other crime, we will not be able to strategically fight it. Whilst significant links to large numbers of organised crime groups are being identified, they require committed resources to develop and analyse intelligence in order to disrupt the crime.

A step-change in mapping the scale of modern slavery

The need for better mapping of the scale of modern slavery is abundantly clear. In an effort to meet this need, this report has drawn on exclusive and pioneering new data to estimate the size of the problem. An innovative new data collection technique tells us that there could be at least 100,000 victims in the UK. This underlines the reality that NRM data reflects just the tip of the iceberg, and paints a picture of a much, much bigger problem than has previously been understood.

How did we calculate this number?

The National Data Analytic Solutions (NDAS) is a partnership of nine law enforcement agencies. It uses data analytics to help build better intelligence and insight from the mass of police data.

Using the crime reports and intelligence records of one of the UK's major police forces, West Midlands Police, this system was able to identify cases where modern slavery was likely to be involved – even if the report or log had not been ‘tagged’ as a slavery case. This is important because there are many reasons why a police officer may not ‘tag’ an event as involving modern slavery; the modern slavery crime tag was only introduced in 2016 and there remains a lack of awareness and training amongst police forces.

As discussed above, modern slavery can be hidden behind other crimes such as benefit fraud.

Having identified all cases that were likely to involve modern slavery, the system is then able to identify the individuals involved and impacted – those responsible and their victims. Based on 2017 data, the system identified there were 4,197 potential victims of modern slavery specifically identified or associated with crime reports and intelligence logs in West Midlands Police Force's area.

Although by nature a unique area, as all police forces are, by extrapolating the number of victims based on the proportion of the population covered by West Midlands Police compared to the overall UK population, which is 23.7 times larger, we can estimate that **the number of potential victims of modern slavery associated with police data nationwide is 99,469**. To put that into context, that is more than the population of Bath.

There are of course caveats to consider regarding the inevitable limitations of estimating and extrapolating data in this way, and these are discussed in appendix 1. However the most significant caveat to consider is that this number is likely to be a **significant underestimate** of the nationwide prevalence, for these reasons:

1. This estimate only includes victims of incidences of modern slavery brought to the attention of the police. It is well documented that modern slavery is a hidden crime and ‘traditional means of measuring crime (victimisation surveys or police records) are less effective at measuring the prevalence of this complex and largely hidden crime whose victims are often too traumatised to report their exploitation or may not self-identify as victims’.¹⁵
2. This data is from 2017. Since 2017, the number of suspected victims identified and referred to the NRM has more than doubled (5,145 referrals in 2017 compared to 10,627 in 2019).^{16,17} The number of modern slavery crimes recorded by police forces in England and Wales in the year ending March 2017 was 2,306 compared to 5,144 modern slavery crimes recorded in the year ending March 2019¹⁸ – a 123 per cent increase. Based on this strong upward trend, the estimate of 99,469 in 2017 could therefore represent less than half of the real total in 2020.

We welcome NDAS' forward-thinking approach to the use of the data and intelligence held by police forces. We believe that analysis of police data similar to that conducted by NDAS has the potential to lift the stone on modern slavery and reveal its true scale and nature across the country.

It is clear that based solely on cases brought to the attention of police, the number of victims of modern slavery in the UK could be much higher than previous Government estimates - without including victims that remain hidden in ongoing situations of exploitation.

¹⁵ UK Annual Report on Modern Slavery, October 2019 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/840059/Modern_Slavery_Report_2019.pdf

¹⁶ National Referral Mechanism Statistics - End of Year Summary 2017, NCA, March 2018 <https://nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/who-we-are/publications/159-modern-slavery-and-human-trafficking-national-referral-mechanism-statistics-annual-report-2017/file>

¹⁷ National Referral Mechanism statistics UK: End of the Year Summary 2019, Home Office, April 2020

¹⁸ Modern Slavery in the UK, Office for the National Statistics, March 2020 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/modernslaveryintheuk/march2020>

Given this new evidence of the extent of slavery in the UK, and the links to tax evasion and benefit fraud reported elsewhere, it is clear that the crime is costing British taxpayers tens of millions - if not hundreds of millions - of pounds a year. We plan to do more work to estimate the true cost of slavery to the public purse, but we can be confident that it amounts to fraud on an industrial level and provides a compelling argument as to why Government should invest more in the fight against modern slavery.

Improvements in professional awareness

During the course of the Modern Slavery Police Transformation Programme, modern slavery training accredited by the College of Policing and other bespoke materials were developed and disseminated across all police forces in England and Wales. Between April 2017 and March 2019 more than 4,000 officers and police staff received modern slavery training at 140 training events held across England and Wales.¹⁹ This has resulted in a marked increase in understanding of the modern slavery crime and their duties under the Act for numerous police officers.

“Prior to the introduction of the Modern Slavery Act 2015, there was a distinct lack of awareness about the crime, no knowledge about the National Referral Mechanism and minimum expectations from the police force to deal with the crime. With the introduction of the Act, fighting modern slavery has been firmly placed on the priority list.”

Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Team, West Midlands Police

For many that we interviewed, the Modern Slavery Act is cited as the main driver for increased levels of awareness among frontline professionals, in particular within the police and to some degree in local authorities. The Act highlighted the duty of police and local authorities to respond to the crime and, in clarifying the offences, made it easier for these frontline agencies to engage. Awareness is notoriously difficult to measure, but the increase is evidenced by a number of key factors: the increased number of NRM referrals, and a sustained police focus in some forces. However we did also hear evidence of a worrying lack of awareness in some areas and amongst some agencies. Whilst we are committed to celebrating successes, the evidence we collected presented a very varied picture.

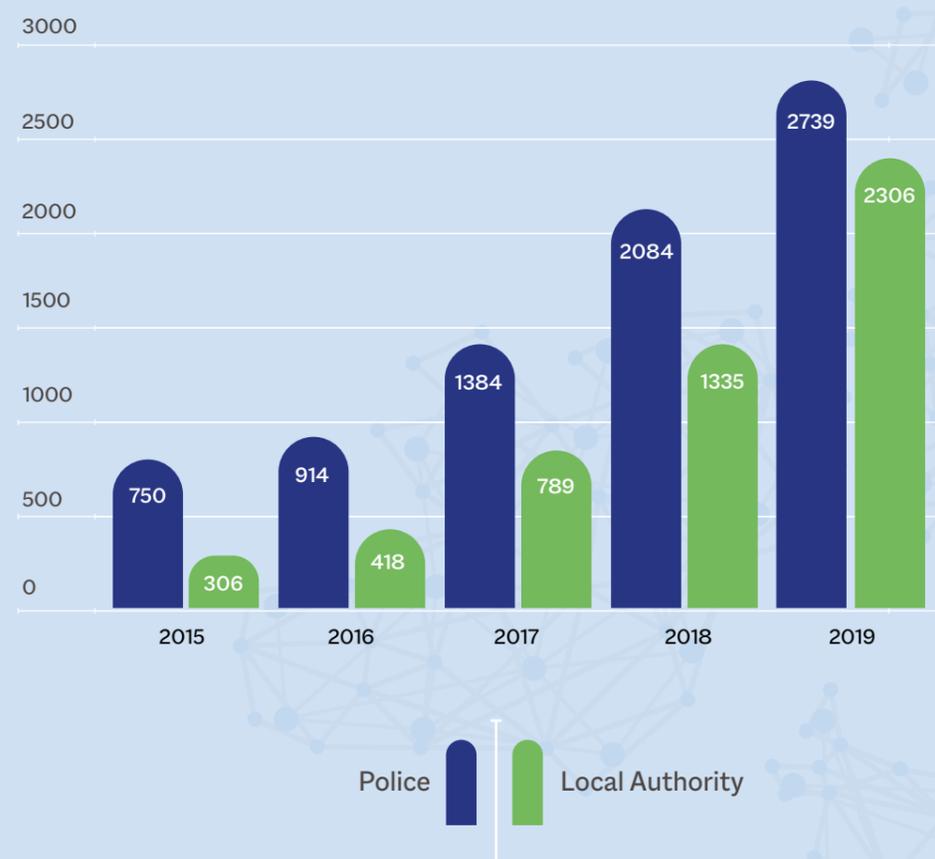
Increased number of NRM referrals as an indicator of increased awareness

The number of potential victims referred to the National Referral Mechanism by the police and local authorities has increased significantly since 2015. As demonstrated in Table 1, in 2019 there were 2,739 potential victims referred to the NRM by police (26 per cent of the total number of referrals by all agencies) and 2,306 potential victims referred by local authorities (22 per cent of all referrals). By comparison, in 2015 there were just 759 potential victims referred by police (23 per cent of all referrals that year) and 306 potential victims referred by local authorities (9 per cent of all referrals). Though the NRM is not representative of the complete picture of modern slavery, this uplift in police and local authority referrals is encouraging.

¹⁹ Modern Slavery Police Transformation Training Programme annual report to 31 March 2019, May 2019 <https://www.npcc.police.uk/Publication/2019/Modern%20Slavery%20Annual%20Report.pdf>

First Responder Referrals: Police and Local Authorities

Table 1



Positive and sustained police focus

Beyond referrals of victims, the positive uplift in policing activity is equally evidence of increased awareness about modern slavery. In 2017, the inspection by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) of the police's response to modern slavery established the under-reporting of modern slavery crimes by the police. This was highly criticised.²⁰ Since then the number of modern slavery offences recorded has been continuously increasing, as shown in Table 2. In the year ending March 2019, police forces across England and Wales recorded 5,144 modern slavery offences, an increase of 51 per cent from the previous year.²¹ Once again this is an encouraging step in the right direction.

The increase in the number of recorded modern slavery offences consequently led to an increase in the number of investigations carried out by the police. At the end of December 2019 there were at least 1,821 ongoing live investigations involving 2,500 potential victims, compared to only 188 investigations in November 2016.²² The two most common types of exploitation under investigation were sexual exploitation in 592 operations (33 per cent) and criminal exploitation in 572 operations (32 per cent), followed by labour exploitation (471 operations), domestic servitude (73 operations) and forced marriage (four operations).²³

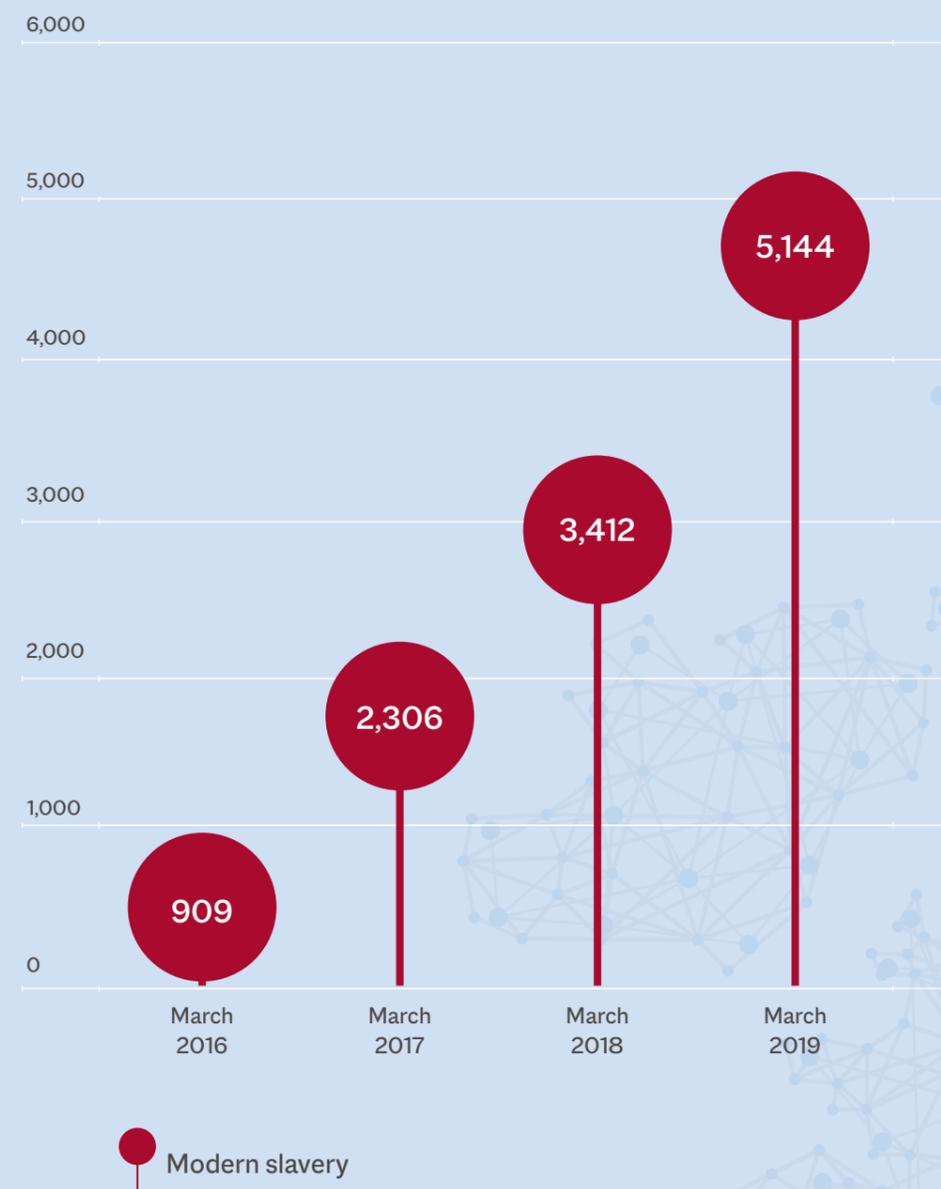
This increase in police focus is encouraging. Across many of the forces we visited we were met with an inspiring level of determination to attack modern slavery and bring the perpetrators to justice. Though many challenges still remain - these will be discussed in the next chapter - it is important to acknowledge the progress made, particularly since it reflects the hard work and commitment of individual police officers and local authority representatives across the country.



20 'Stolen Freedom: the policing response to modern slavery and human trafficking', HMICFRS inspection, October 2017
 21 Modern Slavery in the UK, Office for National Statistics, March 2020
 22 Briefing for non-law enforcement agencies from National Insight Team, Modern Slavery Police Transformation Programme, December 2019
 23 Ibid.

Modern slavery recorded crimes

Table 2



Awareness in the voluntary sector

During our research we met with a number of local charities working with the vulnerable population. We encountered a number of professionals who are aware of the issue of slavery but lack knowledge of how to identify and refer victims for support. Once again, levels of knowledge and awareness were mixed, and often reflected the level of personal commitment of a key individual in a position of authority.

We spoke to charities in Loughborough who suspect that a number of their clients are victims of modern slavery, but struggle to find help and guidance locally. They cited issues with low awareness and the fact that tackling modern slavery is a low priority locally.

“We don’t see a lot of modern slavery in our day to day work, but we have issues of overcrowding in properties and suspect modern slavery is happening there. In one of the most recent cases, a two-bedroom house was flagged to be housing around 10 adults and several minors. This was brought to the attention of the police.”

“There is no discussion in charity and sector network groups about modern slavery other than occasionally if police bring up a particular case. There is clearly a general lack of awareness across the charity sector.”

CEO, The Bridge, a charity that provides support to homeless and vulnerable people in Loughborough

A similar story was told in Plymouth:

“Slavery is still quite hidden. We come across it in an accidental way rather than a proactive way. For example, we have previously stumbled across Eastern European men working in a hand carwash with passports and money taken away by their exploiter. We ask the question more now than we did before and make staff more aware, but we are not looking for it proactively.”

Chief Executive, Shekinah, a charity working with the homeless population in Plymouth

“We haven’t yet come across modern slavery cases within our services. Whilst there is a chance that women who have accessed our drop-in centre have experienced slavery, I can’t say with confidence that all staff would know what signs to look for. I think that our women’s centre would benefit from awareness raising to ensure that staff and volunteers do not miss opportunities to identify cases of modern slavery.”

CEO, Trevi House, a local charity in Plymouth offering residential rehabilitation programme for women with drug and alcohol dependency issues

These examples provide important evidence of the need to increase awareness about modern slavery among local charities working on the frontline with vulnerable groups. It is important to equip those working on the ground with information and essential tools both to identify the hidden victims who have been abused and exploited, and to offer them the support they are entitled to.



PART II: RESPONDING TO THE CRIME

Ileana's story

On her 19th birthday Ileana, a young Romanian woman, was found in a car – along with three other people – by Essex Police. The car was stopped following a joint operation with the UK Border Force that had passed on the information suggesting that the woman could be a victim of modern slavery. The other three adults had historical records of human trafficking. The girl spoke very little English. Justice and Care's Victim Navigator approached her and asked her whether she knew why the car was stopped and what had been happening to her. Ileana burst into tears and told her story.

Ileana had been domestically abused since she was a child. First by her violent father who abused her and her mother, then by her step-father. Ileana and her sister often found themselves on the streets looking for food, sleeping rough, and sometimes finding shelter with distant relatives. Ileana wanted to escape her dire living situation. Through an ex-boyfriend she was introduced to her traffickers – a woman and a man in the same car when stopped by the police – who forced her into sexual exploitation both in Romania and in the UK. They arranged clients for her and took the money she was given. They gave her cocaine to make her work all night and serve multiple clients.

Ileana was first brought to the UK to provide sexual services in July 2019. After some time, she was returned to Romania to do the same, and then trafficked back to the UK. As a result, she was told that she also owed money for her travel and living expenses in the UK. Ileana was only given money for cigarettes. She wanted to run away several times, but was afraid because she saw how another girl was violently beaten by the traffickers after trying to run away. She felt she had no choice but to continue doing what she was forced to do. Ileana said that she needed help to get out.

It was at this point that the Victim Navigator offered crucial help. Explaining her options to her, the Victim Navigator was able to reassure Ileana that help was available. Ileana agreed to be referred to the NRM. Ileana had no belongings with her, no documents, and no money. The Victim Navigator bought her food and took her to a safe house.

Ileana received a 'positive reasonable grounds' decision and was able to stay in the safe house. The Victim Navigator was in touch with Ileana daily to ensure she received the support she needed. Within the first week the Victim Navigator made sure that Ileana was seen by a doctor for a medical check, had access to interpretation to explain her needs, and met with detectives to make sure that she fully understood the situation she was in. Ileana felt safe and protected and agreed to cooperate with the police as they investigated her traffickers.

The Victim Navigator continues to act as a bridge between Ileana and the investigating officer. She took part in a police interview and provided important information and detail which has led to a much larger investigation. Ileana continues to flourish and remains very positive about her future.

Bringing criminals to justice

In recent years the Modern Slavery Police Transformation Programme has put in place support structures to make modern slavery investigations more effective. It published investigative guidance, developed and delivered training for specialist and senior investigators, reviewed case files and debriefed investigations in order to share lessons learnt and spread good practice.²⁴ However, in spite of these positive steps, across every location we visited we heard that investigations are complicated, prosecutions are challenging and convictions are very difficult to secure.

Through our research we sought to understand why police officers dealing with modern slavery crimes are struggling to bring successful prosecutions in court via the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). A number of challenges have been named, including the complexity of modern slavery investigations that require specialised knowledge, skills and training. Some named the transnational nature of modern slavery as a challenge, as recruitment often starts in the victim's country of origin. However, the two challenges raised most frequently are the difficulties engaging with victims and a lack of understanding of modern slavery complexities amongst prosecutors and judges.

Low prosecution and conviction rates

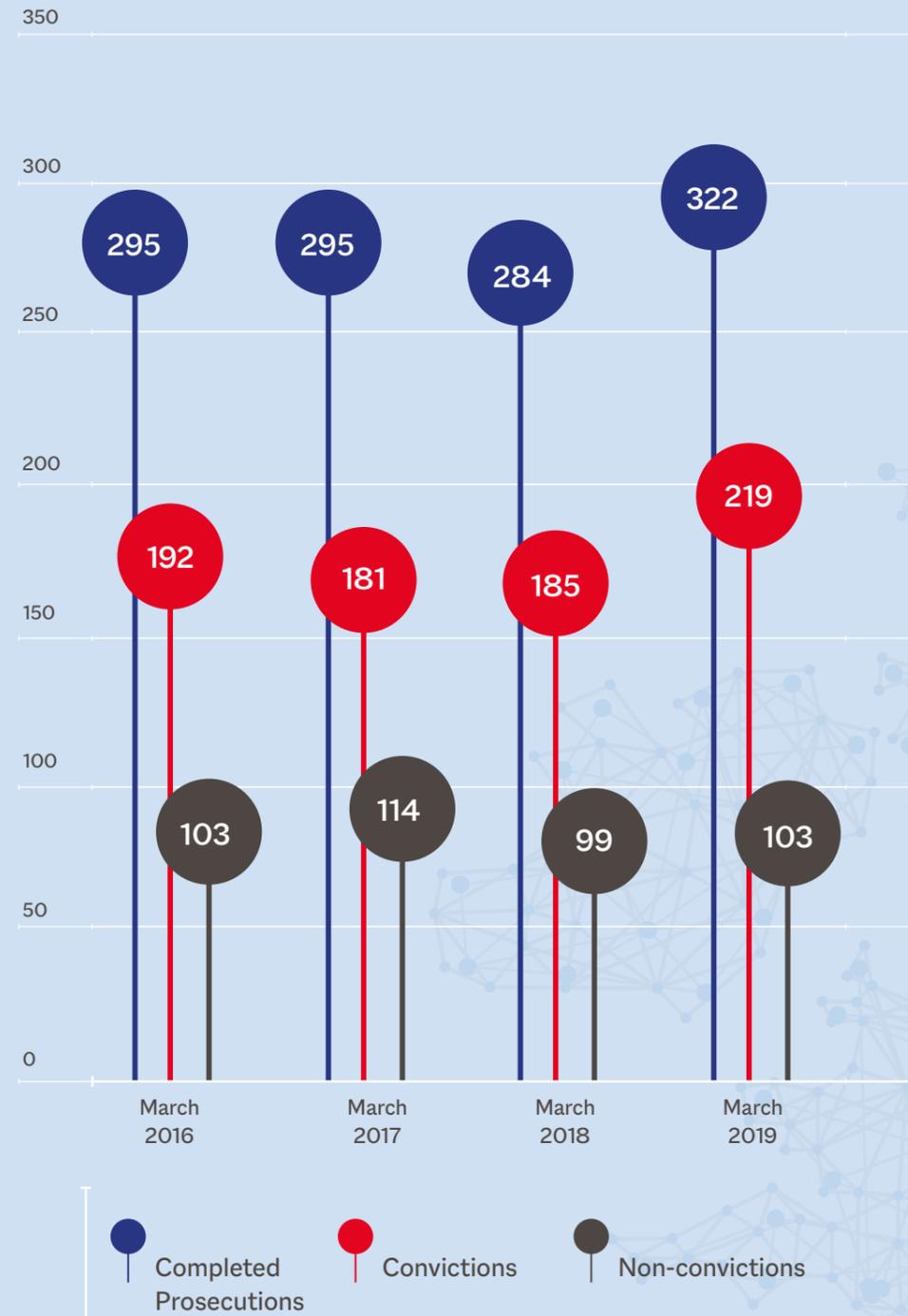
According to CPS data, there were 322 prosecutions for modern slavery-related crimes in the year ending March 2019, a 13 per cent increase from the year ending March 2018. 68 per cent of these resulted in a conviction, bringing the total number of convictions for modern slavery related crimes to 219 in the year ending March 2019.²⁵ Table 3 gives a breakdown of the total number of prosecutions resulting in convictions or non-convictions for individuals flagged as modern slavery offenders each year after the Modern Slavery Act was introduced. According to this data, the number of prosecutions and the percentage of successful convictions has been on average the same – 65 per cent of prosecutions result in a successful conviction. This comparison shows that between the year ending March 2016 and the year ending March 2019 there was only a small increase in prosecutions (9 per cent increase) and convictions (14 per cent increase) for modern slavery-related crimes. However, as shown in table 4 below, the number of victims identified and referred to the NRM has increased dramatically by 119 per cent from 3,430 during the year ending March 2016 to 7,525 during the year ending March 2019. It is clear that prosecutions and convictions are not keeping up with the huge increase in modern slavery crimes, and too many criminals are acting with impunity. This is unacceptable.



²⁴ Modern Slavery Police Transformation Programme annual report ending 31 March 2019, May 2019
²⁵ Modern Slavery in the UK, Office for National Statistics, March 2020

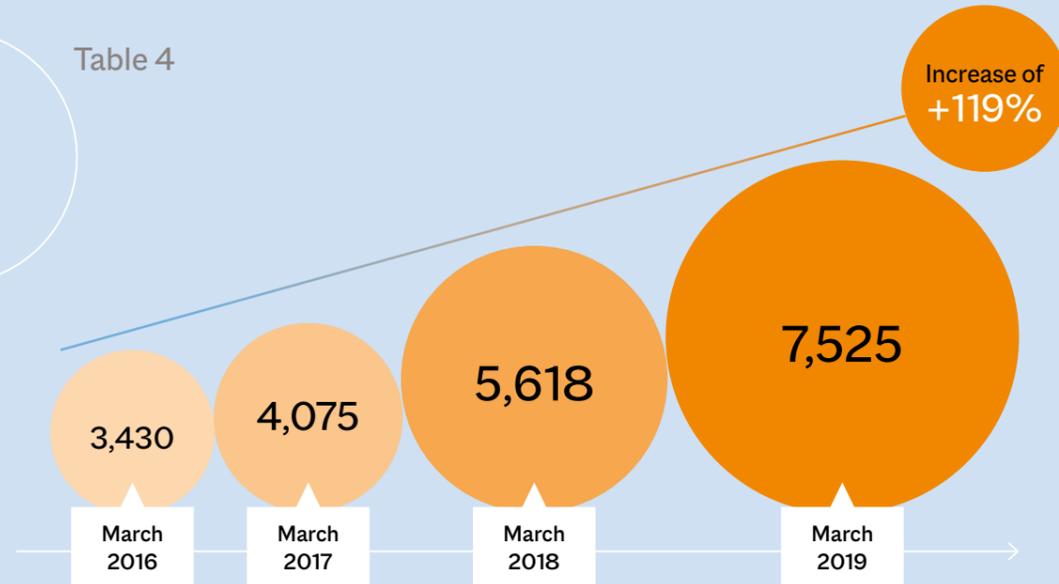
Completed Prosecutions by Outcome

Table 3



Victims identified

Table 4



Transforming victim engagement with the justice system

Many police officers who contributed to the research stated that the biggest challenge they are facing in achieving successful prosecutions and convictions is maintaining continuous engagement with victims, who are inevitably key witnesses in many cases.

“The main issue for all modern slavery investigations is that police officers are often reliant on the victim’s account which is difficult to get, especially at an early stage of the investigation. Many cases are being dropped due to the lack of victim’s account.”

Training Engagement Lead, Modern Slavery Police Transformation Programme

In part, this is because many victims of modern slavery are unaware that they are being exploited or do not want to leave their situation. In some cases, tragically, their experience as a victim of modern slavery can feel like an improvement on the situation they left behind. Leicestershire Police told us that Chinese women who are sexually exploited in pop-up brothels are the most difficult group to engage with. They rarely see themselves as victims because they may be receiving some money for their work, which they often need to either pay their debt for travel or to support their family at home. They are also fearful of deportation, as their immigration status is often irregular.

“The key challenge is proving exploitation, which is not a clear-cut issue. Often potential victims are being paid some money, but the indicators of exploitation, such as control, poor working and living conditions, emotional abuse and coercion are present. However, these are more difficult to prove, particularly when victims don’t want to engage or do not see themselves as victims.”

Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Team, West Yorkshire Police

Victims are also reluctant to engage with the police due to a lack of trust. Building this trust through an interpreter is difficult and reiterates the need for wraparound support for victims of modern slavery from an early stage. It is crucial that victims develop a positive relationship with investigators, but it often requires a trusted third party to broker this connection.

In Swansea we were told that often it is best for the investigation to keep the victim in the police force area. However, for the sake of their safety, victims are often moved to another area or may even be returned home to another country, if they have been trafficked internationally. This means that, without the right support, police officers lose touch with important witnesses and can fail to build a strong evidence base for a successful prosecution.

Caught out in court

Concerns have been raised by police officers about a lack of understanding about modern slavery among the judiciary that have led to either cases being closed or prosecuted under a different legislation. These views have been echoed by charities that are supporting victims during criminal proceedings. Too often the influence of poverty, the desire for a better life, family issues and debt bondage are underestimated or not understood by prosecutors. Crucially, 'consent' is often misunderstood in court.

"The courts often seem baffled by the legislation and unenthusiastic to prosecute for these offences as they see that the victim has either 'consented' to their exploitation (e.g. by being paid) or they believe that the circumstances of the offence are not serious enough in their nature to warrant a modern slavery and human trafficking prosecution."

Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Team, Lincolnshire Police

A recent example is the outcome of Operation Landscaped that was launched in June 2017 in Lincolnshire following intelligence received from the public that a flat in the north of the city was being used to house Chinese sex workers, and that the females working at the flat were believed to change on a regular basis. In September 2017, a victim was rescued from the premises, and the perpetrators were charged with controlling prostitution for gain, human trafficking and money laundering. The case appeared in court in February 2020 when the judge made a ruling. Although the case met the definition of human trafficking, due to the judge's perception that there was 'no interference with the women's personal autonomy', he concluded that there was no merit in prosecuting for human trafficking as the difference in sentencing would be negligible and it was not in the public interest to do so.²⁶

Similarly, one of the recent forced labour cases investigated by Essex police and charged by the CPS failed in court because the victims were not physically restrained during their exploitation. This was taken to be evidence that the individuals were not victims of slavery. This is a fundamental misunderstanding of the definition of modern slavery and should not have been a stumbling block to prosecution. The need for greater training and awareness to put a stop to these kinds of mistakes is clear and urgent.

Sentences are inadequate

Many police officers we spoke to were extremely frustrated at the low sentencing that defendants receive in court. Although the Modern Slavery Act introduced tougher sentencing, even up to life imprisonment, in practice the average sentence for modern slavery crimes committed as a principle offence is between four and seven years. In some cases sentencing is even lower. In March 2020 a Lithuanian couple were prosecuted for offences under the Modern Slavery Act at Liverpool Crown Court. They were sentenced to three and a half years between them for enslaving a 50 year old man and a 51 year old woman who had been forced to work for the couple but had never been paid for their work.²⁷



"The Modern Slavery Act was written in such a way to allow for those convicted to be sentenced to significant terms of imprisonment not only as punishment but also to deter others from this heinous crime. If we don't pursue those behind this crime, we continue to re-enforce the fact that slavery, trafficking and exploitation, are low risk and high profit criminal businesses. Not all victims are threatened with or subjected to violence or threats but they are still being abused and exploited. If we don't allow for appropriate sentencing we will never dissuade the perpetrators from this activity and we will also not persuade reluctant law enforcement agencies and lawyers that it is worth pursuing. Given time, higher sentences will result in fewer victims."

Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Coordinator, East Midlands Region, MSPTP

The Modern Slavery Act has not yet yielded the desired criminal justice outcomes. According to the public poll, carried out as part of our research, 75 per cent of the respondents agreed that a higher conviction rate for offenders would be an effective deterrent against modern slavery. The conviction rate under the Modern Slavery Act remains appallingly low with traffickers getting away with unacceptably light punishment for the type of harm and abuse committed against their victims. It is important to acknowledge that modern slavery investigations are complex and lengthy, and we are yet to see whether the increased number of live investigations launched in 2018 and 2019 will yield an increased number of successful convictions. However, at present it is still the case that modern slavery is a low risk, high return business for organised criminals.

"It is my view that, although sentences are increasing, they still do not reflect the gravamen of what is happening - exploitation is control over someone's life, it is depriving them of free choice whether that be the sale of their body for sex, the work they do or worse. Although the damage to the victim may be invisible to the human eye it does not mean that their suffering is not profound. A message must be sent out that exploitation of one's fellow man is not tolerated. The sentence for modern slavery offences was increased to life to recognise this, yet even in some of the most appalling cases sentences reflective of this heinous conduct are not being imposed."

Caroline Haughey OBE QC

²⁶ Evidence submitted in a letter

²⁷ Lithuanian couple jailed for modern slavery, CPS, March 2020 <https://www.cps.gov.uk/mersey-cheshire/news/lithuanian-couple-jailed-modern-slavery>



Southend, police told us that safeguarding victims and keeping them engaged before and during a trial is the greatest challenge.

“Prosecutions will come when the people feel safe and protected – victims need to know that they are safe and their families are safe so that they can agree to support the prosecutions against their exploiters.”

Southend Community Policing Team

When a victim refuses to engage, police have the option of pursuing a victimless prosecution, but many believe that in such cases collecting evidence becomes even harder, so cases close prematurely for lack of evidence. Some police officers believe that the most successful investigations actually use a covert approach to gathering evidence on cases before they move to an arrest stage. However, this approach is rarely used by officers for a number of reasons, including the cost.

“Covert resources are more frequently used for firearms and drug supply cases, not slavery. Many forces still do not deal with modern slavery as serious and organised crime, and therefore do not allocate covert resources to it.”

Training Engagement Lead, Modern Slavery Police Transformation Programme

To tackle the issue of the lack of engagement and support, Essex Police are one of the five police forces trialling a new concept in partnership with the team at Justice and Care, embedding a Victim Navigator within senior policing teams to broker support and act as a trusted bridge between victims of modern slavery and police investigations. Currently, Victim Navigators are also embedded within Kent Police, Surrey Police, Greater Manchester Police and UK Border Force in Glasgow.

“I am really pleased to be involved in this pilot. Working with partners is key to supporting victims and bringing offenders to justice. The Victim Navigator Role enhances the support investigating officers provide to often traumatised victims by providing dedicated support and access to professional care services.”

Detective Superintendent Andy Waldie, former lead for Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking in Kent and Essex Police

Justice and Care’s Victim Navigator Programme

Justice and Care’s Victim Navigator Programme sees specialist workers deployed in the heart of police forces in the UK - including border teams and serious organised crime units. The Navigators, who are given unparalleled access to cases, provide specialist knowledge from the very start of investigations and provide support to victims. The programme is designed to help those affected to rebuild their lives and to engage victims with the criminal justice system.

The Victim Navigator is specially trained to triage all modern slavery crime recorded cases, and also provides strategic advice and training to police officers to improve victim engagement.

Following a training session of police officers by a Victim Navigator, 98 per cent of those surveyed reported significantly improved knowledge of how to identify victims and 77 per cent reported significantly improved knowledge of how to support victims of modern slavery after the session. Training has led to significant and crucial behaviour change; in one case, four potential victims and two accused traffickers were identified as a direct result of the Victim Navigator training:

“In regards to the shift in behaviour of officers since your input, this was highlighted on a random vehicle stop. The initial stop was for minor traffic related offences however on further investigation the officers found Eastern European females that were being transported to locations for prostitution purposes. The officers by their own admission would not have looked at this had it not been for the input they were given.”

Surrey Road Policing Unit Modern Slavery Single Point of Contact

Since the programme began in September 2018, early stage internal analysis shows that 80 per cent of victims with a support plan have been assisted by their Victim Navigator to access specialist support services relevant to their individual needs, including counselling, safe accommodation, English language lessons and immigration advice. In addition, more than 90 per cent of victims with a full support plan in place have chosen to engage with police.

The Victim Navigator Programme has seen great success in providing victim care and support, improving relationships between police and victims, and supporting police to focus on investigating modern slavery. The dual remit of supporting victims and enhancing police awareness and activity makes Victim Navigators an invaluable resource to the forces they work with.

Victim Navigator

Supporting the abused and exploited

If we are serious about bringing more traffickers to justice, our response to those who are abused by them is fundamentally important. Some consider care for victims as a luxury extra in the process of investigation. This could not be further from the truth. How we treat those who have been exploited, from the point of rescue to their long term recovery, will determine how many criminal networks are dismantled and how far modern slavery is tackled in the UK, as well as how survivors are able to rebuild their lives. Britain must transform its response in this area.

Operation Softail by the South Wales Police is a stark example of what can be achieved when wraparound support for the victim is made a top priority.



Daniel's Story: Operation Softail

Daniel was only 17 years old when he was approached by members of a traveller family who offered him a job and a roof over his head. Instead of these promises, he became a slave at a scrapyards they owned near Swansea, where he was brutally exploited, beaten and abused during the course of several years.

Daniel left home when he was 16 years old and stayed in a hostel for four months. He was soon ejected from the hostel and became homeless. Daniel had a learning disability and other social and mental health issues.

In January 2019, the South Wales police received a call from a man who visited the scrapyards and saw a young man who was very unwell, malnourished and unhealthy. He also had signs of physical abuse.

When Daniel was rescued by the police, he was immediately taken to hospital as he had many untreated injuries. One of the nurses that looked after Daniel said:

"In all of my 38 years of nursing I have never seen such injuries, I have not seen any like this. The sheer amount of injuries left me shocked; they were horrific. I would describe him as looking like somebody coming out of a concentration camp. He was so hungry and thirsty, I couldn't believe how much he wanted to eat and drink."

Daniel's safeguarding was put as a top priority, in recognition not only of his own needs, but of the key role he could play in the criminal investigation. South Wales Police's key rationale for the investigation was:

"It is imperative to the success of this case that we get the safeguarding right, and ensure our victim receives an enhanced level of support to assist him to overcome this horrendous ordeal, and support him through the judicial process.

Past cases have shown that without adequate support during the recovery period, these victims of crime are at risk of further exploitation, as they struggle to meet their essential needs."

Having initially provided Daniel with enhanced care and support, on the third day in hospital, he made disclosures that he was being treated as a slave and subject to daily beatings. Daniel was also supported to provide a number of witness interviews to the police. As a result, both men who enslaved Daniel and forced him to work at their scrapyards for no pay were sentenced to 15 and six years respectively.

Operation
Softail

Increasing complexity in the needs of modern slavery victims

Local authorities and charities have both stated that the main challenge they are facing is responding to the complex needs of victims. Most victims, when identified, present with mental health issues, such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and dependencies that are difficult to address meaningfully and long-term. For many, having no recourse to public funds poses further barriers to moving people on safely, putting victims at risk of homelessness and destitution, and making it more likely that they will fall back into exploitation and trafficking.

“Our approach to victims cannot be so ad-hoc and reliant on the willingness of individual people. We need a system that supports victims fully with a ready-made kit to provide an immediate response.”

Plymouth City Council

Victims who come into support services often have very complex needs, mental health issues and alcohol or drug dependency. Often traffickers target those who have severe needs and trauma that make them vulnerable in the first place. This makes recovery even more challenging as the initial vulnerability is then compounded by the trauma of being exploited and abused. Criminals have been known to use Class A drugs including methadone, cocaine and heroin to control and coerce their victims. There are clear links between organised criminal groups that deal drugs and enslave people. For them, humans are another commodity to be traded.

“We have seen an increase in the referral of vulnerable British nationals - many were victims of county lines. These victims were cuckooed in their places of abode, forced to sell drugs and had their wages paid to them in drugs or alcohol resulting in addictions and complex multiple needs.”

Managing Director, Palm Cove Society

We were also told that some victims were denied access to or had to leave the support provided within the NRM because they had alcohol and drug dependencies, and as a result often became violent and abusive towards support workers or other clients. In some cases victims were left destitute and at risk of being re-trafficked, as alternative support to address these kinds of issues is often difficult to access. In one of the local councils that we visited we were told about a case when a victim was placed with a charity, but was using drugs, became abusive and dangerous for other clients, so had to leave. The victim then was picked up by the local rough-sleeping team who couldn't provide any meaningful support either.

The Liberty Project²⁸ named a number of challenges that they encounter in their daily work supporting adult victims of modern slavery. In Plymouth, similar to other areas that we visited, they are struggling to get access to legal advice for victims, as well as psychological and counselling services:

“Counselling services are reluctant to take our clients in, as we are unable to say how long a victim will be staying in our safe house or independent accommodation, as starting and then stopping counselling can cause more damage. There is a lack of training for psychological professionals to be specialised in dealing with modern slavery.”

Liberty Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Team,
Bournemouth Churches Housing Association

Struggling National Referral Mechanism

Britain's victim identification and support system - the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) - was established 10 years ago following the ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings. In its current form the support system for potential victims of modern slavery has many flaws. The NRM has been struggling to cope with the increasing volume of cases and the diverse group of victims with varying levels of need. It is a slow and complex bureaucratic system and leaves far too many victims unable to get on with their lives because of the delays in the decision-making process. The NRM must be completely overhauled to be person driven and not a tick-box exercise.

Some positive reforms are underway but these are slow and still fall short of what is required. We heard from numerous police officers that the NRM system often causes delays in putting in place vital support for victims, which has led to some victims going missing. Across the locations we visited, we heard of significant successes with creative support measures that are aimed at addressing the gaps, but we also heard multiple stories of victims not receiving the help they needed, including not being able to return home when they wished to. We were told of delays in crucial decisions, as well as barriers to accessing support and a serious lack of long-term support.



²⁸ The Liberty project is currently supporting victims of modern slavery throughout the South of England under the the Government funded Victim Care Contract for adult victims of modern slavery in England and Wales <https://www.bcha.org.uk/our-services/supported-housing/human-trafficking/the-liberty-project/>

Delayed decision-making processes

When an adult potential victim who is referred to the NRM receives a positive 'reasonable grounds' decision, they are entitled to Government-funded support. This includes access to accommodation or outreach support, financial aid, interpretation services, access to legal aid for immigration advice, medical care and counselling, and assistance to return home should they wish to. The support is provided for a minimum of 45 days, constituting what the Government calls a 'recovery and reflection period' until the 'conclusive grounds' decision is reached.²⁹ Despite Government promises to speed up the decision-making process as part of the NRM reform³⁰ many victims are spending months, sometimes years, waiting in limbo until their NRM decision comes through. Around eight in 10 potential victims referred to the NRM in 2019 were awaiting a 'conclusive grounds' decision at the end of the year (this amounts to 8,429 cases).³¹

We heard from the charities who are supporting victims that such prolonged waiting times are negatively affecting victims' recovery. The Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, Dame Sara Thornton DBE QPM called this period *"an agonising wait about their future"* and called for a radical reform of the support system which currently *"is not doing enough to equip them [victims] to become survivors and to live a life of sustainable independence"*.³²

Barriers to accessing support

Adult victims of modern slavery need to provide informed consent to be referred to the NRM for support. Following a referral, it takes on average five days for a 'reasonable grounds decision' to be made, which enables access to the support provided by the Salvation Army during the 'recovery period' of at least 45 calendar days. Whilst potential victims who are facing destitution can access emergency support,³³ the reality on the ground paints a different picture. Too often, when a suspected victim is identified they may be placed in a bed and breakfast or a hotel, or be interviewed at the police station. Often they are not properly informed of their rights and entitlements, do not have the time to process a decision, such as being referred to the NRM, and do not understand the implications of accepting or declining support.³⁴

"There is a delay between the time of referral and the initial decision as to whether there are positive or negative grounds to believe that an individual is a victim when the victim has no formal status and therefore cannot access these services. As a result, South Wales Police have to accommodate them in hotels and B&Bs, and must leave them alone in these new surroundings during the immediate aftermath of their extraction - the most critical time - without any support. Or alternatively, the Salvation Army will place the victims in accommodation across the UK, which further isolates the victim, and as such we risk losing the victims to their traffickers once again. There are no local facilities available to counter the significant difficulties we face following the extraction of a victim."

South Wales Police and Crime Commissioner's Team



Safe Place: pre-NRM support for male victims

The support for the time before a victim has decided whether or not to agree to an NRM referral has been identified as a significant gap at a national scale. The introduction of 'places of safety' was announced as part of the wider NRM reform in October 2017.³⁵ However, these have not yet been implemented. New 'places of safety' are expected to be rolled out nationally as part of the new adult Victim Care Contract in late 2020.

In Birmingham, police and charities have taken matters into their own hands. As a result of the specific needs of the victims they are encountering, the West Midlands Anti-Slavery Network works in partnership with West Midlands Police, Birmingham City Council, Public Health England and other organisations to pioneer additional support for male survivors before they enter the NRM. Referrals are made by the police immediately after potential victims have been rescued from the situation of exploitation. This project has demonstrated that specialist multi-agency support is required from the moment of identification. Fear of becoming homeless is one of the stumbling blocks for potential victims to exit exploitation in the first place; if they can be assured they will not be destitute, they may be more likely to seek help.

"Vulnerable people should not be expected to start their journey to recovery from a position of destitution and homelessness."

Development Manager, West Midlands Anti-Slavery Network (WMASN)

³⁰ Statutory Guidance on how to identify and support victims of modern slavery in England and Wales, March 2020

³¹ Home Office announces NRM reform, October 2017 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/modern-slavery-victims-to-receive-longer-period-of-support>

³² National Referral Mechanism statistics UK: end of the year 2019, Home Office, April 2020

³³ 'Victims are waiting for too long for the decisions - The time has come for a radical reform', Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, February 2020 <https://www.antislaverycommissioner.co.uk/news-insights/iasc-blog-victims-are-waiting-too-long-for-decisions-the-time-has-come-for-more-radical-reform/>

³⁴ Statutory Guidance on how to identify and support victims of modern slavery in England and Wales, March 2020

³⁵ Pre-NRM accommodation experiences of survivors of modern slavery, October 2019 <https://www.antislaverycommissioner.co.uk/media/1334/pre-nrm-accommodation-experiences-of-survivors-of-modern-slavery.pdf>

We also heard that victims (in particular EU and EEA nationals) who do not consent to being referred to the NRM and wish to return home are unable to do so safely. Unacceptably, they are left to their own devices to find their way home and risk being re-trafficked without the appropriate means and support to return safely.

“During the course of the last five years, both in my time within the law enforcement sector as well as the NGO sector, I have observed a trend when a victim from the EU would want to return home safely within a day after being rescued. This sense of urgency places the police or the supporting agencies in a difficult position. Adequate risk assessments and background checks cannot be carried out, and arranging support services from the point of arrival to the airport in the home country is almost impossible in such a short time. On some occasions, a victim was put on a plane with a phone call to the authorities in the home country only a few hours before the arrival. Acknowledging the fact that not every victim wishes to enter the NRM and stay in the UK, proper consideration needs to be given to what support options can be put in place to ensure a safe return and minimise the risk of re-trafficking. Future investments in this area need to be informed by the evidence from the frontline professionals as well as the victims’ voice.”

Cristina Huddleston, Director of European Operations, Justice and Care

Long-term support

Long-term support is a further significant gap in the support system. In recent years a number of reports have concluded that lack of long-term support puts victims of modern slavery at risk of homelessness, destitution and even re-trafficking after they exit the NRM support provision.³⁶ It also has a significant negative impact on their engagement with the criminal justice system. Many survivors are unable to access welfare and healthcare systems, education and employment and have no income because they do not have recourse to public funds and their immigration status is not confirmed. This draws many back into exploitative situations.

In 2017 the Government announced six pilot projects with local authorities to test new ways of how best to support victims to transition out of NRM support and into local communities. The pilot projects were completed in early 2020 with final evaluation reports expected to be published later in the year. We visited two of these six areas – Birmingham and Leeds – and spoke with the local authorities and charities involved in the projects. During these projects, victims were offered housing, medical support, counselling and education and employment support. Early evidence suggests that with the right intervention in place victims’ recovery is much smoother as they strive to be independent and rebuild their lives.

In Birmingham, the Pathways project was subcontracted to Spring Housing, a well-established housing provider with a capacity to house up to 50 people and provide outreach support to many more. The focus of the project was to provide resilience and trauma-informed support to men who were exiting the NRM support. The support package included accommodation, access to medical care, training and employment advocacy.

Ivan’s story

Ivan was referred to the Pathways project by the Salvation Army. He was placed into a shared property with Spring Housing where he quickly settled in and made friends. Upon arrival Ivan had no money and no recourse to public funds. In Poland Ivan used to be a pizza chef. His support worker helped him find a job at an event catering company. Ivan was very happy to start working in the kitchen environment. He also attended English classes with the Jericho Foundation.³⁷

Ivan is doing very well now. He is praised by his manager at work and his English teacher. He is feeling much happier and confident as he is now earning a living and is independent.



Pathways project

³⁶ ‘Life Beyond the Safe House’ Human Trafficking Foundation 2015; ‘Fresh Star’ University of Liverpool 2017; ‘Hope for the Future’ Ashiana, Hestia, Red Cross 2019.

³⁷ The Jericho Foundation is a charity in Birmingham that helps vulnerable people into supported employment. <https://jericho.org.uk>

In Leeds the Pathways project was implemented by Leeds City Council in partnership with the Palm Cove Society. It focused on providing ongoing advocacy support based on the individual needs of each victim, including access to housing, mental health support, access to education and work, and support with criminal proceedings. The support that the survivors received during the pilot significantly improved their housing prospects, work opportunities and general wellbeing. One of the starkest outcomes is that all 62 adult survivors referred to the Pathways project between April 2018 and September 2019 supported a criminal investigation.

“The pilot in Leeds served as a much needed opportunity to test interventions to help victims of modern slavery. We saw around 60 victims receive holistic support from Palm Cove and many had long standing, complex needs around mental health, addiction and practical issues such as housing and language support. The pilot prompted us to review our current arrangements and, as a result, the council have developed a range of work-streams looking at governance, NRM referrals, pathways, training and work to address gaps in service provision.”

Safeguarding and Domestic Violence Team, Leeds City Council

“Victims of modern slavery, especially those with high complex needs, take longer to recover. They need time and professional support to overcome their trauma. It may take years. During the course of the Pathways pilot project, we quickly established the link to a successful prosecution was survivor focused support that facilitated survivor engagement with law enforcement.”

Managing Director, Palm Cove Society

The Government is yet to decide what the long-term support for survivors of modern slavery is going to look like in the UK following the publication of the final evaluation report. However, it is clear that long-term support is not only vital to the recovery of the survivors, but is also key to ensuring they are able to participate in the arduous process of supporting a criminal investigation. Any efforts to fight the crime of modern slavery must put the survivor at the centre; this is not just an issue of morality and human dignity, but will also vastly improve the prosecution and conviction rates for traffickers as their victims engage with the criminal justice process. Our polling demonstrates that the public are overwhelmingly in favour of providing the long term support necessary for victims, with 80 per cent saying they should be given support until they have fully recovered.

Plugging the gaps: Further examples of local support

Across the places we visited, we continued to find outstanding examples of innovative work to meet the needs of victims who were being failed by the support on offer from the Government.

The Adavu Project in Birmingham provides long-term support to adult survivors of modern slavery making the transition into life in the local community.³⁸ They provide ongoing advocacy and casework support to help survivors develop life skills and access benefits, training, education, and employment as well as engage with therapeutic provision. A large proportion of clients referred to the Adavu Project are women who have been victims of sexual exploitation and domestic servitude.

In Wales a Victim Response Pathway has been developed mapping out the process that needs to be undertaken by the different agencies during the identification, referral and support of victims of modern slavery. Within this model, individual authorities have developed their own ‘Care Pathways’ that are tailored to fit alongside their processes and structures. The initial ‘Victim Response Pathway’ model was developed in 2014 by Bawso jointly with partner agencies and the support from the Welsh Government.³⁹ Since then it has been rolled out across Wales. The ‘Pathway’ puts in place the initial response and responsibilities of services when a victim of trafficking has been encountered.

These projects are examples of gaps being filled at the local level where the national system has failed. They prove that there has not been enough support put in place for survivors of modern slavery to enable their successful long-term recovery and participation in the criminal justice proceedings from the first hours of rescue.

“Responding to modern slavery is not treated as ‘business as usual’. It is still a very new area and we are learning significantly.”

Adavu Project Manager



Adavu
Project

³⁸ Adavu is a project founded in 2011 by the registered charity, Birmingham Methodist District <https://www.adavu.org.uk>

³⁹ Bawso is a Welsh charity providing support to adult victims of modern slavery across Wales under the Government-funded Victim Care Contract.

British nationals: Questions and complexities

Across the country we found that British victims of modern slavery are in many ways worse off than foreign national victims when it comes to available support, as frontline agencies tend not to refer British suspected victims to the NRM. We believe the current statistics therefore mask a much greater cohort.

There are a number of reasons why this is the case. First, the NRM was designed a decade ago to respond to the growing problem of trafficked victims who, at that time, were understood to be brought into the UK from abroad for exploitation. It is therefore perceived that the NRM is designed to support victims who are foreign nationals and who do not have access to the British welfare system. Second, British victims often have very complex needs, and some are not willing to engage with the NRM. Thirdly, and most disappointingly, there is still a lack of awareness and understanding of the NRM among frontline professionals who fail to recognise British nationals as victims of modern slavery and exploitation in the first place. This has wide-ranging consequences, some of which we were told about by frontline charities:

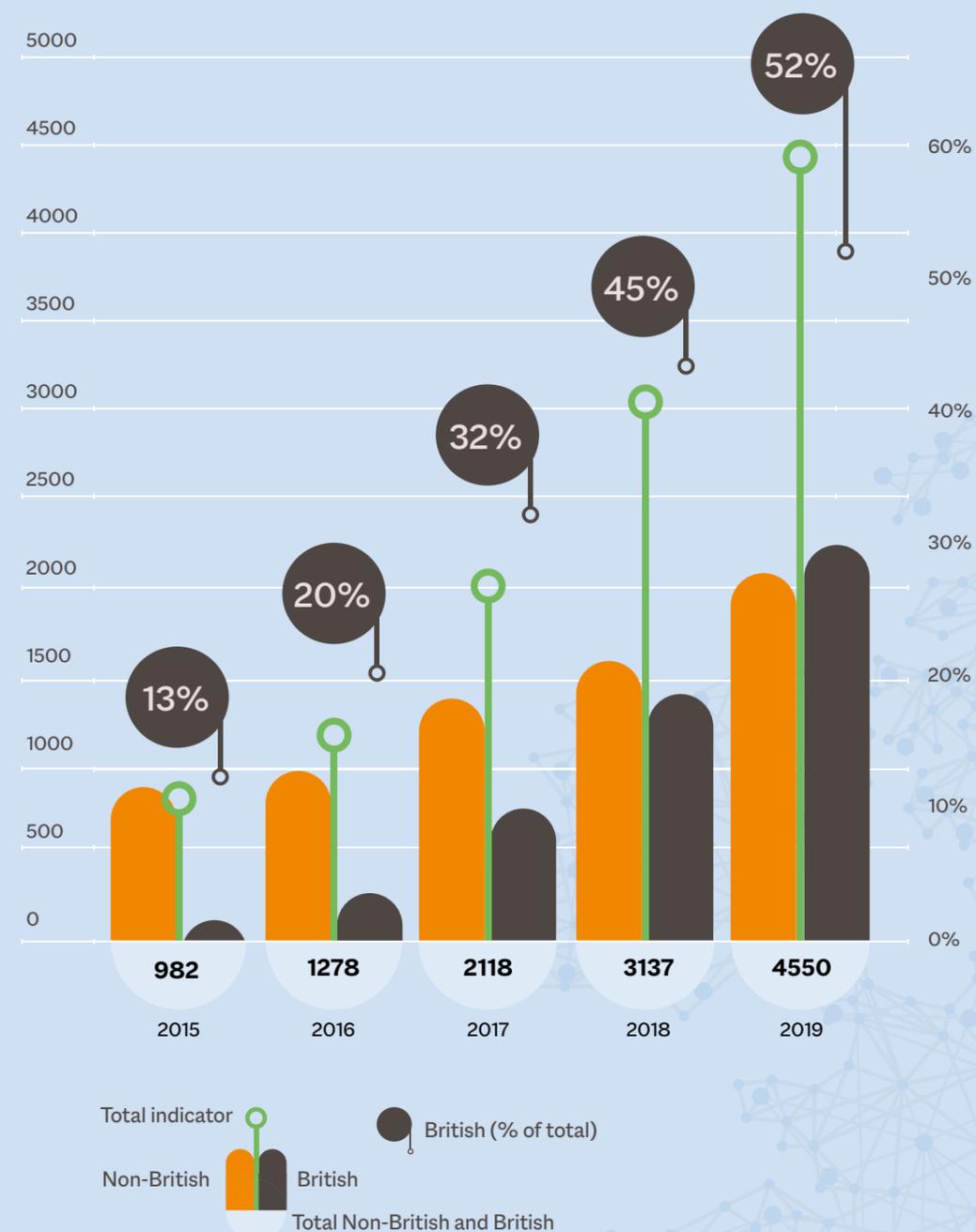
“We are contacted by parents whose children have been criminally exploited by the county lines gangs. The overwhelming and consistent theme emerging since we started in 2018 is the routine failure by First Responder Organisations to complete NRM referrals for these children despite their involvement with them over a lengthy period. When parents seek clarification, it is transpiring that the First Responder Organisations have never heard of the NRM and, therefore, are unaware of their statutory obligation to refer British child victims of criminal exploitation into it. What follows next is a reluctance to view the children as victims and, therefore, a push-back on referral, the assertion that the NRM is only for foreign modern slavery victims, or that the NRM provides no gains for child victims of criminal exploitation. For many families, the ensuing battle to secure a referral becomes as traumatic as the exploitation itself.”

SPACE, an organisation campaigning for awareness about child criminal exploitation and working with affected families

Over a quarter of the 10,627 people referred to the NRM in 2019 (2,836) were British nationals, and 83 percent of this number were British children.⁴⁰ A sharp increase of British children referred to the NRM occurred in 2018 with 1,421 trafficked children referred compared to 676 in the previous year, as shown in Table 5.⁴¹ In 2019 this number increased by another 66 per cent, with 2,360 British children identified as potential victims of modern slavery.⁴² Many of these children were targeted for grooming, violence and exploitation by drug gangs enslaving them into criminality to transport drugs and money to and from urban areas to suburban areas and market and coastal towns.

Child Referrals: British and Non-British

Table 5



⁴⁰ National Referral Mechanism statistics UK: end of the year 2019, Home Office, April 2020
⁴¹ National Referral Mechanism Statistics - End of the Year Summary 2018, NCA, March 2019.
⁴² National Referral Mechanism Statistics UK: end of the year 2019, Home Office, April 2020

It is deeply concerning that even though British victims have topped the NRM statistics in the country of origin since 2017, this figure still represents only a fraction of the true number. There is a serious risk that the NRM numbers give the false impression that authorities are engaging properly with British victims of modern slavery. This is not the case, and too many are being missed. We were told that often frontline professionals working with vulnerable British children either do not know about the NRM or do not see the benefits of an NRM referral.

“While referrals of children who are criminally exploited are rightly increasing each quarter, these figures in no way represent the true scale of child criminal exploitation given the reluctance by too many police forces and local authorities to refer exploited children.”

SPACE, an organisation campaigning for awareness about child criminal exploitation and working with affected families

We believe there is a hidden cohort of British victims who are not shown in any NRM statistics and therefore remain invisible. A lack of NRM referrals also means that access to support for British victims is extremely difficult.

“Some of the worst cases I’ve come across are young British women who’ve been groomed since childhood and continue to be exploited as adults. They have very high needs, which are often a combination of complex-PTSD, other mental health issues, and substance misuse. Agencies and individual professionals frequently struggle to engage with them, or even to recognise them as victims of modern slavery. The NRM doesn’t begin to address their needs and, in most cases, they won’t be referred into the NRM. They either go back to the perpetrator or end up in a psychiatric hospital.”

Modern Slavery Community Service Manager, Black Country Women’s Aid

For Bawso, a charity supporting victims of modern slavery in Wales, one of the current biggest challenges they are facing is British victims not being able to access the housing support they need. Many come from disadvantaged backgrounds and have highly complex needs, including addictions and mental health issues. However, when they want to move to another area to feel safe and settled, they are not taken by that local authority as a priority need because they do not have a local connection. This is a problem that is not unique to Swansea and Wales. In one of the most recent cases a High Court Judge had to intervene to compel the Home Office to provide accommodation and support to a British young woman who was repeatedly trafficked for criminal and sexual exploitation.⁴³

In Plymouth, as in Swansea, we also heard of the difficulty in accessing local authority housing for British modern slavery victims who have experienced criminal exploitation, despite their entitlement to public funds.

Fiona’s story

Fiona, a middle-aged British woman, is a victim of criminal exploitation. Her house was taken over by a gang to store drugs and operate their criminal activity.

Fiona had previously been a victim of domestic abuse, being fed drugs by her violent partner. As a result, she became an addict. Her son was taken into care and she struggled to escape from this damaging relationship.

Many years passed before Fiona was well enough to have contact with her grown-up son. At that time, she lived in a small town in the South West of England and was receiving treatment to become drug free.

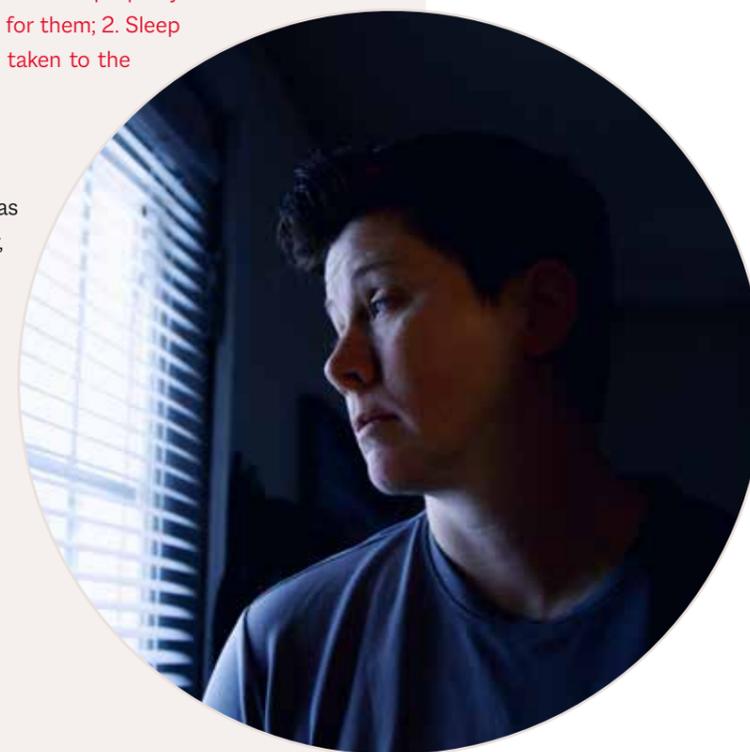
Fiona lived on her own and felt isolated. She found some ‘friends’ to talk to. They gained her trust quickly. She let them into her house without a second thought.

The moment they moved in, five men took over her property. These exploiters gave Fiona three options: 1. Sell drugs for them; 2. Sleep with the men they brought to the house; 3. Be taken to the Devonshire moors and never come back.

Fiona ‘chose’ to sell drugs.

Later, the house was raided by the police. Fiona was arrested, as were the men in the house. However, the gang continued to harass her. The police understood that Fiona was a victim and referred her into the National Referral Mechanism.

Fiona is currently receiving outreach support from one of the subcontractors of The Salvation Army. However, she still lives in the property she was abused in. Her support worker has been fighting to get access to another type of independent housing, but to no avail so far.



The lottery of local leadership

A significant issue across the country is the lack of strategic guidance and resources on the frontline, resulting in patchy examples of good practice but no consistency in approaches. If modern slavery is to be strategically disrupted, this ‘postcode lottery’ of leadership and awareness must be addressed.

⁴³ ‘British woman repeatedly trafficked for sex after Home Office failures’, the Guardian, February 2020 <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/feb/16/british-woman-repeatedly-trafficked-for-sex-after-home-office-failures>

Good practice at regional and local levels

The Southend Borough Council and local police told us that though the Modern Slavery Act consolidated and clarified the previous legislation, there is still a lack of strategic direction or additional resources allocated from the Government to deal with this crime locally. This has led to a ‘postcode lottery’ of leadership, where some areas fight the crime strategically and consistently, and others barely scratch the surface. Similarly, in Swansea we heard that the modern slavery response is inconsistent due to the lack of strategic guidance and adequate resourcing. Training and awareness are still missing and many frontline workers do not know about their duties under the Modern Slavery Act. The modern slavery response continues to be personality driven, lacking the necessary structures, policy and investment to make it ‘business as usual’.

“Training and awareness about modern slavery is still missing at the local level. It is not mandatory or statutory. There are no additional resources provided to support the training to First Responders. Many still don’t know they have a ‘duty to notify’ (Section 52) under the Modern Slavery Act.”

Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking MARAC Coordinator in Wales

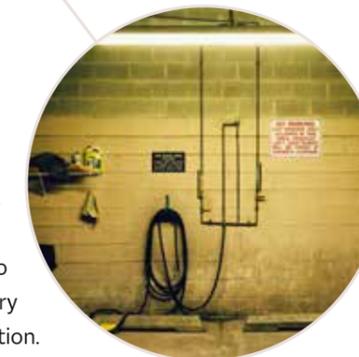
Across the cities and towns we visited, we saw some examples of good practice:

- West Yorkshire Police have a designated Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Unit that was set up with the vision and support from the West Yorkshire Police and Crime Commissioner to research and investigate trafficking in human beings. In 2014, when the team was created, it was one of only two dedicated teams in the country. Since then it has developed a multifaceted approach to tackling modern slavery in the region. Safeguarding Units and Crime Investigation Teams at each of the five policing districts have been trained in this area of work and conduct district-level investigations.

“The Force Human Trafficking Team predominantly deal with modern slavery and human trafficking on an organised crime level but they also provide support to the district teams to ensure best practice is disseminated, consistent approaches are taken and that intelligence is properly collated and acted upon.”

Mark Burns-Williamson OBE, West Yorkshire Police and Crime Commissioner

- The Southend Against Modern Slavery Partnership, funded by the Essex Police and Crime Commissioner, has held a number of community workshops to raise public awareness about how to spot the signs of modern slavery and where to report possible concerns. The partnership has brought key multi-agency partners together to improve their understanding of what modern slavery looks like locally and how to tackle the crime on the ground. One of these initiatives focuses on the risk of modern slavery in hand car washes in the area.



- To respond to cases of modern slavery identified in Wales, the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARACs) – a regular local multi-agency meeting – was adopted. This framework had been developed and used for years to respond to domestic violence cases. It was first convened in 2013 to respond to a modern slavery case where two girls from the Czech Republic were rescued from sexual exploitation. Since then this approach has been developed to cover all police force and local authority areas in Wales.

“The benefits of the modern slavery and human trafficking MARAC process is that it allows us to ensure that once the victim has been encountered all safeguarding measures are in place, and the information shared at the meeting will feed into the NRM decision making process ensuring that the potential victim is able to access the support services under the Government-funded victim care contract.”

Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking MARAC Coordinator in Wales

- A multi-agency Anti-Slavery Partnership covering the Devon and Cornwall area was established in December 2015, building on the experience and expertise of the Avon and Somerset Partnership model developed by the charity Unseen. Both come under the umbrella of a wider South West Anti-Slavery Partnership that “aims to support victims, disrupt criminal activity and prosecute perpetrators”.⁴⁴
- In the West Midlands, the Sandwell Anti-Slavery Strategic Partnership led by Sandwell Council put in place a permanent modern slavery coordinator, and developed strong governance and accountability arrangements. It developed victim pathways and guidance to increase awareness and provide clarity for Sandwell Council staff to carry out their role effectively when dealing with potential victims of modern slavery. These have been embedded into frontline training across the local authority. It has also established an operational group to respond to concerns raised but also carry out proactive disruption visits. During April 2019 – March 2020 it received 171 concerns, compared to 47 the year before. It carried out 98 multi-agency disruption visits and 468 interventions took place; as a result, 406 potential victims of modern slavery have been screened.⁴⁵

These examples of good practice are almost exclusively the work of committed individuals in the police force, local authority and charity sector, who have taken extraordinary initiative to step up the fight against modern slavery in their area. However, this ‘postcode lottery’ is not enough to strategically disrupt modern slavery, which often involves serious organised crime and global networks.

⁴⁴ South-West Anti-Slavery Partnership <https://www.aspartnership.org.uk/purpose>

⁴⁵ Sandwell Modern Slavery report 2019-2020 http://www.sandwell.gov.uk/info/200348/modern_slavery



Inconsistent responses

Launched in April 2017, the Modern Slavery Police Transformation Programme was designed to deliver ‘improvements in the efficiency and the effectiveness of the police response’.⁴⁶ The focus of the programme has been on identifying and promoting good practice, strengthening partnership work, providing resources and ensuring coordination to help facilitate better sharing of information within the police system. During the course of the programme, all 43 police forces in England and Wales have benefited from the support and resources provided to improve their local capability and local response to modern slavery.⁴⁷

However, there is only so much a central programme with limited time and resources can achieve on the ground. Local ownership and commitment are vital. The picture across all 43 forces is still very inconsistent. On a number of occasions, we heard that a more robust response to modern slavery was developed because of the individual commitment of a Chief Constable or a Detective Chief Inspector.

The role of the Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) should not be underestimated in prioritising the fight against modern slavery and human trafficking locally in their Police and Crime Plans, holding their police forces to account and providing additional resources to deliver against those plans. The PCC for West Yorkshire, Mark Burns-Williamson OBE has been leading the way in making tackling modern slavery a priority for his own police force area and providing additional resources for anti-slavery efforts, but also in his role as the Association of Police and Crime Commissioner’s (APCC) Lead, by establishing a national network of PCCs, encouraging his colleagues to do the same in their areas.

“Through the National Anti-Trafficking and Modern Slavery Network⁴⁸, I have encouraged PCCs to specifically identify modern slavery within their police and crime plans as a way to ensure that these resources and skills are developed and properly targeted”.

Mark Burns-Williamson OBE, West Yorkshire Police and Crime Commissioner

We found a similar picture at the local authority level during our research: committed individuals crying out for more guidance and better resources to tackle the crime. In Southend we found that local authorities have struggled, particularly in the absence of Statutory Guidance under Section 49 of the Modern Slavery Act, which was only published in March 2020. They have developed internal referral pathways for victims, but questions remain about exactly which department should be responsible for the cost of supporting victims of modern slavery. Once again, the leadership vacuum is clear; direction is urgently needed.

⁴⁶ Modern Slavery Police Transformation Programme, Annual Report ending 31 March 2018 https://www.npcc.police.uk/Publication/MSPTP_Annual_Report_to_310318.pdf

⁴⁷ Modern Slavery Police Transformation Programme, Annual Report ending 31 March 2019

⁴⁸ The National Anti-Trafficking and Modern Slavery Network <https://www.westyorkshire-pcc.gov.uk/get-involved/national-anti-trafficking-and-modern-slavery-network>

“The Modern Slavery Act put a duty on us to identify and support victims of modern slavery, but we have not been given any guidance or additional resources on how to do that.”

Department for People, Southend-On-Sea Borough Council

Local authorities find it challenging to respond to modern slavery cases without strategic direction and appropriate resourcing from Government and guidance as to how to align it with other priorities. There is a lack of data collection and sharing, and most of the information is anecdotal which undermines the response. According to the Prevent and Protect Team at Essex Police, part of their role is providing training and awareness:

“The level of training regionally and nationally needs to be more consistent, across all sectors. Southend Local Authority have made significant progress, but many other Local Authorities lack awareness about modern slavery and their duties under the Act.”

Prevent and Protect Modern Slavery Co-ordinators, Serious Crime Directorate,
Kent and Essex Police

Shockingly, we heard that many public authorities are still unaware of their Section 52 ‘Duty to Notify’. This is a statutory responsibility to alert the Home Office of potential victims they encounter. This duty can be discharged either by submitting an NRM referral for children and consenting adults, or by submitting a ‘Duty to Notify’ form when the consent for an NRM referral is not provided.⁴⁹ From January – December 2018 there were 1,597 ‘Duty to Notify’ forms submitted, which is a marginal increase from 1,552 forms submitted during the same period in 2017.⁵⁰ It is highly likely that the number of victims not reflected in the NRM or ‘Duty to Notify’ data may be much higher. This also means that many victims may be denied access to the vital support they are entitled to and need in order to break the chain of continuous abuse and exploitation.

“Despite all of the awareness raising we carry out in Wales, there is more work to be done and the message reinforced in order to keep modern slavery at the forefront to ensure more victims are identified, rescued and supported; and where possible their perpetrators are brought to justice.”

Welsh Anti-Slavery Coordinator, Steve Chapman

Statutory Guidance under Section 49 of the Modern Slavery Act on how to identify and support victims of modern slavery was published on 24 March 2020 – five years on from the Modern Slavery Act.⁵¹ This is a huge delay to crucial guidance. The guidance is designed for public authorities who may encounter a potential victim of modern slavery, those who are involved in supporting potential victims, and those authorities who make NRM decisions on whether or not an individual is a victim of modern slavery. It sets out how the system works at present, which sadly has many policy gaps that many victims fall through. It has not provided any new avenues for victim support and does not include any additional resources or training to enable Local Authorities and other organisations to do their job properly.

This means Local Authorities will have to continue to use other avenues, based on rough sleeping and homelessness legislation, to provide accommodation to those victims who leave NRM support. Unfortunately not all victims will be eligible for such support and therefore they will remain at risk of destitution and further harm.



A law of unintended consequences

An alarming finding throughout our research was the increase in cases of county lines criminality and its links with modern slavery. A relatively unknown form of crime when the Modern Slavery Act was passed, it is now one of the main reasons for children being referred to the NRM.

What is county lines crime?

The term county lines refers to the criminal trend of urban gangs supplying drugs to suburban areas, as well as market and coastal towns, by using dedicated mobile phone lines or ‘deal lines’. Gangs use children and vulnerable people to move drugs and money to these areas. Once caught up in county lines, exploited individuals are at risk of extreme physical and sexual violence and gang recriminations.⁵² In many cases, county lines is widely understood as an issue of modern slavery.

⁴⁹ Statutory Guidance on how to identify and support victims of modern slavery in England and Wales, March 2020

⁵⁰ Modern Slavery in the UK, Office for National Statistics, March 2020

⁵¹ Statutory Guidance under section 49(1) of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 covers indicators that a person may be a victim of modern slavery, the support available to potential victims and victims, and the decision-making process for determining if someone is a victim.

⁵² County lines: criminal exploitation of children and vulnerable adults, Home Office
<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/county-lines-criminal-exploitation-of-children-and-vulnerable-adults>

Cases of criminal exploitation of children by county lines gangs have skyrocketed in recent years. Every police force that we visited named an increase in county lines activity as the main trend in their area, but also the main challenge.

“County lines and criminal exploitation is the biggest issue with local children being recruited from local schools.”

Southend Community Policing Team

“Gangs from out of our force area are recruiting children and adults and facilitating their travel to South Wales where they are then used to supply controlled drugs.”

Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Lead, South Wales Police

“The most recent development and currently the main challenge is the rapid growth of child criminal exploitation for moving drugs along the county lines, ‘cuckooing’⁵² and using vulnerable youngsters as drug dealers.”

Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Team, West Yorkshire Police

In Plymouth we heard similar accounts of the exploitation of children who are moved across the country to transport illegal drugs. Local police are working to build the picture of how this criminality works. Meanwhile, local authorities are trying to understand the needs of this cohort of children and how to keep them safe. According to the Liberty Project:

“Forced labour and sexual exploitation are high however recently we have seen a significant increase of vulnerable clients being subject to criminal exploitation by the county lines gangs. This is high in the Plymouth area and a number of victims remain in the house that they were cuckooed in.”

Liberty Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Team, BCHA

According to the NCA’s National Strategic Assessment of Serious and Organised Crime 2020:

‘The number of claims of exploitation in coerced criminality - where victims are forced to commit crimes - continued to increase during 2019, overtaking those of both labour and sexual exploitation for the first time...Exploitation in county lines drugs supply remains the most frequently identified form of coerced criminality, with children representing the vast majority of victims.’

In this already complex landscape of county lines criminality, we also heard of further confusion related to one specific provision in the Modern Slavery Act: the Statutory Defence under Section 45.

What is the Statutory Defence?

Section 45 of the Modern Slavery Act introduced a Statutory Defence to protect victims from being prosecuted for certain crimes that they may have been compelled to commit as a direct result of being a victim. The Statutory Defence is an important protection for victims of modern slavery that derives from the non-punishment/non-prosecution clauses under the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings and EU Anti-Trafficking Directive.

In every police force that we visited, misuse of the Statutory Defence under Section 45 was named as the main threat in the application of the Modern Slavery Act. We received a number of reports from police who explained to us that criminals abuse the Statutory Defence by claiming that they themselves are victims of modern slavery and should therefore not be prosecuted.

“It is an abused defence and the law works against the police, in that the accused only has to prove on the balance of probabilities that they are a victim, but the police have to prove beyond reasonable doubt that they aren’t. In addition, the police have been, and still are, obsessed with trying to prove suspects are not victims after their arrest, and this is almost impossible.”

Training Engagement Lead, Modern Slavery Police Transformation Programme

Police officers in Plymouth were particularly frustrated with the potential abuse of the Statutory Defence, saying that it was challenging to prove when someone is not telling the truth.

“Just to give you an example, in one of the recent cases we were dealing with a teenage boy who had been on our books for a while for drug activity and gang related crime and who was involved in a robbery. He was arrested and he then raised the Statutory Defence. As the investigative officer I felt adamant that he was not a victim and was misusing the Act. It was clear there was limited knowledge of this subject from other agencies within the criminal justice system. There must be some guidance from the Home Office on how to distinguish between true and false victims.”

Police officer, Devon and Cornwall (Plymouth) Police

⁵² ‘Cuckooing’ is a term used when drug dealers take over a local property, normally belonging to a vulnerable person, and use it to operate their criminal activity from. <https://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/what-we-do/crime-threats/drug-trafficking/county-lines>

We were told the same in Swansea, where police believe that one of the biggest risk areas of the Modern Slavery Act is the abuse of the Statutory Defence under Section 45.

“The Section 45 Defence does present a significant flaw, and there is an ongoing campaign which seeks to address this. Typically, if a defendant claims a defence, the burden of proof falls to them. However, in this instance, that burden of disproving the defence falls to the police, which is extremely difficult.”

South Wales Police and Crime Commissioner’s Team

The greatest concern is that cases will be dropped because this section of the Act is being misused and causing confusion. This is unacceptable, and it will take a concerted and coordinated effort from law enforcement and the judiciary to ensure that criminals do not walk free and that true victims do not fall through the net. It is also crucial that the Government assess this section of the Act to see if more can be done to bring clarity and assist police and prosecutors in applying it effectively. The principle enshrined in Section 45 of the Modern Slavery Act is right: victims should not be prosecuted for crimes they were forced to commit whilst they were abused and exploited. However, much more training and guidance must be given to law enforcement agencies as they seek to balance this important protection with bringing criminals to justice.

The scale of the abuse of the Statutory Defence is unknown, as there is no data centrally collected. The Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, Dame Sara Thornton DBE QPM, called for evidence earlier this year in an effort to understand how the Statutory Defence has been used. She has publicly spoken about the issue many times and called the police officers “to investigate more, not less” when the Statutory Defence is raised. The Commissioner has also expressed concerns about the failure to identify genuine victims who are then prosecuted rather than protected.⁵³

We heard over and over again from police officers that they need additional training, resources and guidance on how to distinguish between a victim and a perpetrator when the Statutory Defence under Section 45 of the Modern Slavery Act is raised.



Slavery in a pandemic: The impact of COVID-19



During the course of this research, the world has been turned upside-down with the COVID-19 pandemic. Whilst the long-term impact of this global crisis remains to be seen, we know that the immediate impact on victims of modern slavery is profound. We have therefore gathered additional evidence from those working to fight slavery on the frontline to paint a picture of the immediate need and the long-term risks in fighting modern slavery in the era of COVID-19.

Immediate effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on modern slavery and our response to it

The unprecedented nature of the pandemic and the speed with which it hit the UK caused chaos and disruption to anti-modern slavery efforts across the country. Victim identification and support, criminal justice proceedings and active investigations were all disrupted. Some police officers were redeployed away from modern slavery teams. Support workers were limited in their activity. Technology for communicating with victims was lacking at the start of lockdown.

Fewer victims rescued from exploitation

The national lockdown meant that victims of modern slavery were even more hidden and isolated, drastically reducing any chance of rescue. We were told by a number of frontline professionals that detection rates and referrals of victims have significantly reduced due to the decreased capacity of the police and restrictions imposed by the pandemic. According to the NRM statistics for the first quarter of 2020, which only covered the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and start of the lockdown, there was a 14 per cent decrease in the number of victims referred compared to the previous quarter.⁵⁴

⁵³ Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner Call for Evidence: Use of the Modern Slavery Act’s Section 45 Statutory Defence, January 2020 <http://www.antislaverycommissioner.co.uk/news-insights/closed-iasc-call-for-evidence-use-of-the-modern-slavery-act-section-45-statutory-defence/>

⁵⁴ NRM Statistics in the UK, quarter 1 2020, June 2020 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/national-referral-mechanism-statistics-uk-quarter-1-2020-january-to-march>

“We have been receiving a reduced number of referrals. Victims are locked away and we don’t have the opportunity to find them. Where are they?”

Managing Director, Palm Cove Society

Lockdown also meant that charity workers and interpreters had to provide their services via the phone. Not having face to face interaction made establishing trust with victims a challenging task, in some cases leading to them disengaging with the police, refusing access to support and, ultimately, returning to their traffickers.

“Two women were rescued from a situation of sexual exploitation by the police and had been interviewed on the phone by one of our workers. They refused to speak at all, and there was nothing we could do, although we knew they were victims.”

Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking MARAC Coordinator in Wales

Reduced support services provided to victims

Current survivors of modern slavery have been made even more vulnerable by COVID-19 as lockdown and social distancing measures reduced their access to support. The majority of organisations have continued to provide support to victims, but their approach has had to change. Safe houses remained open and continued their work. In Wales support workers reduced their shifts to limit the risk of spreading the virus. Outreach support for victims who are not living in safe houses has changed significantly since it could not be carried out face to face. For example, Bawso support workers call their clients to assess their needs and only saw those with high needs. Some organisations, such as Unseen (Bristol) and the Snowdrop Project (Sheffield) delivered food packages for their clients, as well as arts and crafts packages for families with children. The Snowdrop Project went a step further to provide their clients with phones and tablets to ensure they had the opportunity to stay in touch with the world.

In addition, victims had no access to immigration advice and could not obtain new documents from their relevant Embassy, since these services were temporarily shut down. The Justice and Care Victim Navigator in Essex dealt with a case of a victim whose visa was due to expire. She could not access immigration solicitors to support her case, which placed her at serious risk of being arrested for immigration offences. Since many borders were closed due to the pandemic, those victims who wished to return home were not able to do so.

We are also concerned that victims’ longer-term recovery has been jeopardised as many charities providing critical support have been adversely affected and had to close their services. This, coupled with the lack of employment opportunities in the aftermath of the pandemic will inevitably put victims at a higher risk of being re-trafficked whether they choose to stay in the UK or return home.

Decline in mental health

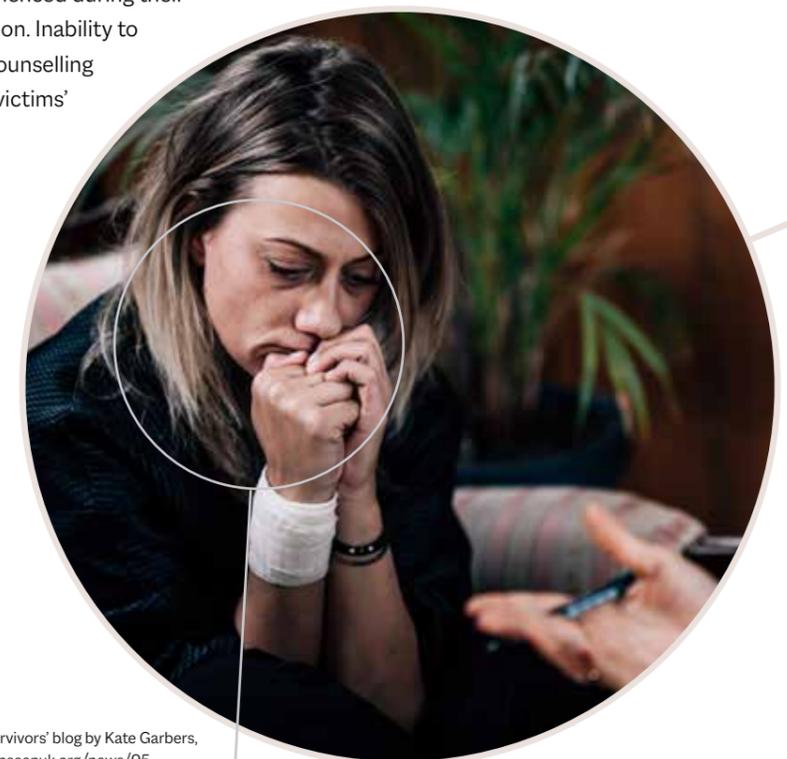
Despite the many efforts to keep support services going, some charities have reported a decline in victims’ mental health.

“We usually deal with victims who have a severe trauma and have high support needs. Our support workers called and visited clients daily. We have seen an increase in alcohol and drug taking by the clients as the result of social isolation measures. In two cases where we had to intervene victims were suicidal.”

Managing Director, Palm Cove Society

Palm Cove Society also told us that victims were feeling more restless which could put them at risk of being enticed back by traffickers. In one case two victims left the service provision saying that they had received a ‘job offer’ in London. The organisation providing support to these victims remained highly concerned about their situation, as it is very unlikely that they received a legitimate job offer under the lockdown restrictions. There is a great concern that they have been re-trafficked.

According to Unseen, a charity that provides support to victims of modern slavery in the South West, for some victims the confinement under lockdown has triggered memories of abuse, control and isolation that they experienced during their exploitation, causing re-traumatisation. Inability to access mental health services and counselling has caused further deterioration of victims’ mental wellbeing.⁵⁵



⁵⁵ ‘The impact of Covid-19 on Modern Slavery Survivors’ blog by Kate Garbers, Director at Unseen, April 2020 <https://www.unseenuk.org/news/95>

Criminals changing their tactics and becoming more abusive

While many premises where slavery and exploitation were taking place, such as brothels, hand car washes, nail bars and massage parlours, had to temporarily close due to the lockdown, it did not automatically mean that slavery and exploitation ceased. We were told that criminals simply adapted their tactics, as they were not prepared to lose their profits. In the West Midlands, following a raid on a cannabis factory, a number of suspected victims were rescued. Further inquiries revealed that the victims were moved from working at a hand car wash to the cannabis factory after the car wash was forced to close during lockdown.

With the increased demand for food production, packaging and delivery services, some police officers shared with us their concerns that criminals would move and exploit their victims in these industries.

Recent reports of a spike in COVID-19 cases in Leicester have exposed links to modern slavery and exploitation in garment factories supplying clothing to fast fashion retailers. These workers are not only being exploited in situations of suspected forced labour, but they are also at serious risk of contracting the virus. It is crucial that this issue is properly investigated.

Appallingly, the sex trade has continued to thrive during the pandemic, with much of it moving online. In the West Midlands (Sandwell) there was a 280 per cent increase in advertising of sexual services on adult websites with many new individuals, predominantly from Eastern Europe, appearing online. In Wales, two suspected victims were identified in rented accommodation after a neighbour called the police complaining that there were people coming in and out and not abiding by the lockdown rules. One of the women disclosed that she had been trafficked and forced to provide sexual services, whilst the second woman refused to engage and said she was doing the job voluntarily.

In Birmingham an increase in on-street prostitution has been observed:

“We have seen more women, mainly class A drug users, on the streets. They were not getting the same number of clients as before the lockdown. Other income avenues, such as shoplifting, were closed. Pimps became more aggressive forcing these women to go into the streets.”

Modern Slavery Community Service Manager, Black Country Women's Aid

Black Country Women's Aid also told us that they were receiving reports from women in the sex industry that their pimps were much more aggressive and abusive in confined premises. In addition, feedback from the frontline professionals who are supporting victims suggests that during the lockdown victims found themselves in increased debt bondage as all their expenses were classed as debt that victims will have to pay after the lockdown. Another charity working with victims reported increased violence towards victims during lockdown, including a case where one victim was shot with an air rifle and another brutally beaten, to the point of needing reconstructive surgery, by exploiters who had simply become drunk and bored during lockdown.

Furlough scheme exploited by criminals

In an effort to avoid mass unemployment as a result of the pandemic, the Government introduced the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, widely known as the furlough scheme, allowing employers to claim a portion of salaries for staff who may otherwise have been made redundant as a result of the pandemic. The scheme has, understandably, won many plaudits.

However we have heard emerging evidence that the scheme has been exploited by criminal networks, who have claimed furlough payments for victims of slavery who were forced to work within their businesses such as car washes and nail bars.

This tactic is unsurprising given the clear links – explored in this report – between modern slavery and benefit fraud. If the emerging evidence we have seen is widespread, taxpayers are likely to have been defrauded of millions of pounds.

Disrupted partnership work and training

Partnership work and training activities have been disrupted due to the restrictions put in place to contain the virus. In Sandwell, multi-agency welfare and enforcement visits were temporarily interrupted, partly due to limited personal protective equipment (PPE) availability. In some instances, charity support workers were not available to support welfare visits due to being furloughed. This has negatively affected the quality of support provided to victims. Proactive work was similarly disrupted in the West Yorkshire area, as modern slavery was driven further underground and not reported in the same way as before.

Criminal justice on pause

The impact of COVID-19 continues in the courts, where cases have been paused or slowed down dramatically. Victims waiting to give interviews and testimonies were forced to wait until the necessary technology was in place. An already difficult and often traumatic experience has been made even more challenging for survivors seeking justice. Research by the Victim's Commissioner published in March 2020 showed that victims of crime were losing confidence in the criminal justice system since the COVID-19 pandemic was causing delays in pursuing justice.⁵⁶ In cases of modern slavery, securing the engagement of vulnerable victims is hugely challenging. With the additional impact of the pandemic, there is a serious risk that victims will withdraw from the criminal justice process and traffickers will walk free.

⁵⁶ 'Victims statistics year ending March 2019', Victim's Commissioner, March 2020 <https://victimscommissioner.org.uk/published-reviews/victims-statistics-year-ending-march-2019/>



Modern slavery and human trafficking crisis in the aftermath of the pandemic

It is a serious risk that the crisis triggered by COVID-19 will lead to a rise in modern slavery and human trafficking. The main drivers of modern slavery – poverty, lack of opportunity and other vulnerabilities – will intensify, resulting in an increased risk of exploitation and abuse. Measures put in place by Governments to mitigate the spread of the virus are having a catastrophic socio-economic impact, in particular on already vulnerable and marginalised populations. The UN estimates that 40 million – 60 million people will be driven into extreme poverty, and the equivalent of 305 million full-time workers with a 48 hour work week will be lost, resulting in the biggest employment decline and global crisis since the Second World War.⁵⁷ Millions of people will be driven into desperation to meet their basic needs and to provide for their families, which will ultimately increase the risk of exploitation. The inability to find jobs locally and restrictions on travel to other countries freely and safely will increase susceptibility to smugglers and traffickers who will use dangerous routes and increased debt bondage to force many into slavery.

Nationally, since the pandemic began and until 6 May at least 1.8 million people applied for Universal Credit as a result of losing their jobs.⁵⁸ Returning these people to work will be a difficult task. Food banks across the UK have seen an increase in demand from many people who have been made redundant. In Southend, the local council has seen an increase in demand for foodbanks from families who previously worked in hand car washes. The local council tried to help those who were eligible to receive welfare support, but not all of them had recourse to public funds, leaving some in desperate situations and at greater risk of being exploited.

Many vulnerable children have been left unprotected during the pandemic, putting them at risk of being groomed into criminal and sexual exploitation. According to the Department of Education, only five per cent of almost half a million children classed as vulnerable attended school in April 2020.⁵⁹ The Children's Commissioner for England, Anne Longfield, released a report in April 2020 warning that hundreds of thousands of children could be recruited by criminal gangs as they were not on the radar of schools and social services during the lockdown.⁶⁰ According to Barnardo's National Counter-Trafficking Service, there has been an exponential increase of trafficked children being referred into the Independent Child Trafficking Guardian service for support provided by the Regional Practice Coordinator.⁶¹ Furthermore, many of these referred children were struggling with their emotional and mental health, had no allocated social worker and were not known to children's services.⁶²

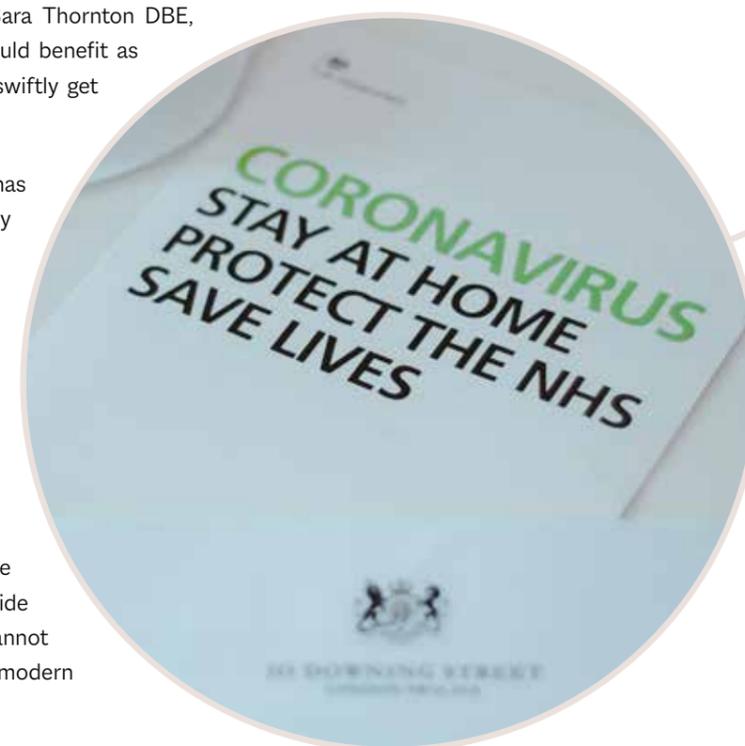
Modern slavery happens when criminals prey on the most vulnerable in our society. As a result of COVID-19, many more people are at risk. People living in poverty or facing financial insecurity, those in overcrowded or unaffordable housing, low-wage workers and people in precarious jobs, especially migrants who have no recourse to public funds, women experiencing domestic abuse and violence and children from disadvantaged families, in particular those who are not in schools, will all be at a higher risk of falling prey to unscrupulous traffickers. In addressing the effect of the

pandemic on our economy and society we should not overlook the risks faced by these vulnerable groups. We must address these inequalities to protect those in need and prevent them from falling into exploitation and slavery.

As the lockdown eases and many of us look forward to regaining some sense of normality and 'business as usual', it is crucial that the increased risks of modern slavery are addressed. Traffickers who are keen to increase their profits will force their victims to work to return their debts, and – as we heard from one support charity – to provide more sexual services to clients who are "preparing to celebrate the freedom and use the money they saved during the lockdown".⁶³

The Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, Dame Sara Thornton DBE, has expressed her concerns that human traffickers could benefit as industries are seeking to recruit low-paid workers to swiftly get back to business.⁶⁴

There is no doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic has adversely affected our efforts to tackle modern slavery in the UK. Having learnt the lessons we must ensure that necessary guidance and resources are in place to identify and support victims. We must ruthlessly pursue the criminals, not allowing delays in court proceedings to enable them to act with impunity. Police and other law enforcement agencies must be better equipped to understand and address the new trends of this evolving crime and to ensure an intelligent and well-resourced response to bring traffickers to justice. Technology should be made available to facilitate access to judicial processes and to enable victims to provide the vitally important evidence, where feasible. We cannot allow COVID-19 to distract us from the fight against modern slavery. Action is now more crucial than ever.



57 How COVID-19 is changing the world: a statistical perspective, Committee for Coordination of Statistical Activities, 2020 <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ccsa/documents/covid19-report-ccsa.pdf>

58 'Biggest number of new Universal Credit claims paid in a single day' Press release, DWP, May 2020 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/biggest-number-of-new-universal-credit-claims-paid-in-a-single-day>

59 'Just 5% of vulnerable children were in school last week', the Guardian, April 2020 <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/apr/21/just-5-of-vulnerable-children-were-in-school-in-england-last-week>

60 'We're all in this together?', Children's Commissioner for England, April 2020 <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/cco-were-all-in-this-together.pdf>

61 'The aim of the Regional Practice Coordinator is to take a strategic role, working with professionals already supporting children who have been trafficked, rather than working on a direct one-to-one basis. The role of the Regional Practice Coordinator has a particular focus on children for whom there is someone with parental responsibility in the UK.' Interim Guidance for Independent Child Trafficking Guardians – Early Adopter Sites, July 2019.

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64 "Traffickers could profit when UK eases lockdown, anti-slavery chief warns", Thomson Reuters Foundation, May 2020 <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-britain-slavery-tr/traffickers-could-profit-when-uk-eases-lockdown-anti-slavery-chief-warns-idUSKBN22HOA4>

PART III: FIGHTING BACK

Moving forward: Principles and recommendations for reform

Modern slavery is a much larger problem than official figures recognise in the UK. It still happens here. Five years on from the Modern Slavery Act, exploitation and abuse of vulnerable people continues and too many criminals are profiting from some of the most shocking forms of human abuse imaginable on British soil.

The Government is right to focus on 'hidden harms' like domestic abuse, especially in the context of the COVID-19 lockdown. We urge them to ensure the fight against modern slavery is front and centre of this work. While positive progress has been made since the passing of the Modern Slavery Act - thanks to political leadership, committed and passionate police officers and local authority staff, dedicated NGOs caring for survivors and those businesses who have led the way in stamping slavery out in supply chains - there is still much more to do to ensure Britain rids slavery within our country and leads the global fight again.

With insufficient data and understanding about the crime, we still too often fight it with one hand tied behind our back. With inconsistent leadership locally and inadequate support for the abused and those trying to bring them to justice, we are often struggling to make the progress required. This can change.

Fighting modern slavery is a huge task, but by no means is it insurmountable. **With the right focus in Westminster and across the regions**, and with the right strategy and proportionate resources, we can launch the next phase of our all-out assault against it. This report calls on the Government to act now, building on recent progress.

KEY PRINCIPLES FOR REFORM

To fight the problem we need to understand its true scale: Trying to fight UK slavery without accurate data and analysis is not working. Clearly this is one of the more hidden crimes, but unless we achieve a better understanding about the scale and nature of it across the UK, we will continue to under-invest and underestimate it. Organised crime will thrive for as long as this inadequate picture persists. We need a better grip on the reality of modern slavery.

Good care for the exploited and abused is not a luxury extra - it unlocks progress against organised crime: Those exploited and abused on British soil, whether UK citizens or foreign nationals, deserve care and a chance to recover. They also often crave justice. Failure to support survivors increases re-trafficking rates and hinders our ability to dismantle the criminal networks managing the abuse because their vital evidence and intelligence is lost. It is time to invest for their benefit and ours.

The voluntary sector can play a unique role, in coordination with police: Victims tend to struggle to trust the police in the early stages of their rescue and recovery, but they will often engage with charities offering support. The best organisations find a way to care for victims and support police efforts to bring traffickers to justice. Where it is proving successful, this innovation should be incentivised by the Government and Police and Crime Commissioners, and it should be scaled up.

Bringing more traffickers and slave masters to justice is essential: Far too many criminals run riot, trafficking vulnerable people in and out of the UK, and within our communities. Until we significantly increase prosecution and conviction rates, they will continue to consider trafficking and slavery as a low risk, high return activity. Working with our regional and global partner countries, we need a renewed focus at our borders, across police investigations and in our justice system.

More foreign national victims can be helped to return home safely: Good care does not necessarily mean survivors need to stay in the UK. Many would welcome the opportunity to return home but lack support to make the journey safely, to recover when they return home or to keep in touch with police investigations in the UK.

As the pandemic subsides, prevention is crucial to ensure that modern slavery is not given a chance to flourish: Law enforcement agencies need to act in a concerted effort to understand the changing threat and be appropriately resourced to take action against criminal networks. The Government should focus on the most vulnerable by putting in place robust protection measures to prevent them from falling prey to unscrupulous criminals. Businesses need to be held accountable for supply chain transparency as they start to return to normal operations.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO STRENGTHEN OUR FIGHT

The 2015 Modern Slavery Act created a more effective framework for fighting slavery in the UK. Greater focus is now required to utilise the provisions of the Act to their full potential. Innovation is needed to understand the crime, to improve our national response to survivors and to reform the way we work with source countries for UK trafficking.

Getting a grip on the problem:

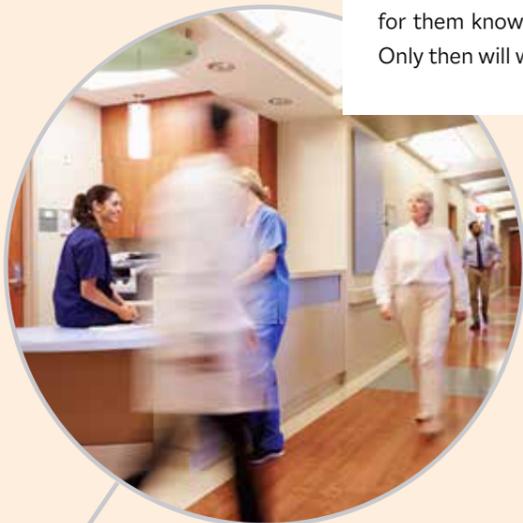
1 The Government must produce a new cross-departmental modern slavery strategy setting out clear responsibilities, actions and outcomes for tackling this crime. The Taskforce once chaired by the former Prime Minister to tackle modern slavery and exploitation was the right structural approach to achieve cross-Government action and appears to have stopped meeting. It should be revived to spearhead the delivery of the new strategy, bringing together key departments and the UK's law enforcement agencies, as well as the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, intelligence services and key delivery partners. **Modern slavery should be enshrined at the heart of the Government's new 'Hidden Harms' agenda.** A stronger and better coordinated national approach is now required if we are to strategically fight this crime.

2 The new police analytical tool, NDAS, should be scaled up and commissioned to publish an annual national assessment about the prevalence of modern slavery. We understand that the Government has pledged to embrace new technologies, such as artificial intelligence, and empower the police to use those to crack down on crime, as well as to create a world-class National Crime Laboratory. Delivery of this type of assessment might become a step forward that would fulfil this pledge. For years people have freely admitted that the UK's slavery problem is larger than official figures suggest, but it is now time to recognise that the scale and seriousness of our fight will be hindered for as long as we continue to operate based on a significant underestimation of the problem. Although we will never achieve a totally accurate picture given slavery's hidden nature (and it can prove a distraction if that is our sole aim) the more robust view NDAS provides would compliment NRM data and deliver a much better criminal snapshot year-on-year. In turn this would enable the Government to tailor its anti-slavery strategy and investment proportionately. Early calculations based on an NDAS sample suggest there could be at least 100,000 victims of modern slavery in the UK each year. This is a conservative estimate. Some in Government may be nervous about the economic implications of recognising the true scale of the crime and therefore the investment required. But, as our report and many other reports have highlighted, there is a serious and wider cost attached to ongoing under-investment too - including through more crime, re-trafficking and benefit fraud.



3 **Regional anti-slavery strategies should be required, based on NDAS findings, to tackle the crime accordingly.** These should be tailored to regional threat assessments, aim to address the specific characteristics of the crime in that area and link together support services necessary to enable victims' recovery. They should also include prevention and education measures to stop the crime from happening in the first place. These should involve a range of stakeholders and could be integrated into the already existing multi-agency partnerships. Good practice exists but robust regional strategies are absolutely vital to secure the buy-in, commitment and resources from all partners to ensure an all-out assault on perpetrators and a needs-based approach to victims.

4 **Mandatory training should be introduced to ensure that public authorities are aware of their duties under the Modern Slavery Act.** A number of training and awareness raising materials have been produced for the public sector to provide basic knowledge and understanding about modern slavery. Police, Gangmasters Labour and Abuse Authority, UK Border Force, Local Government Association, and the NHS have all produced resources and guidance to enable their staff to spot the signs of modern slavery. However, knowledge on the ground remains weak, with a number of public authorities not even aware of their duties under the Modern Slavery Act. Mandatory modern slavery training needs to start early, with modern slavery courses embedded within professional qualifications and inductions. Specifically, it is not enough just for Local Authority staff to be trained. To address the significant gap in awareness and understanding of modern slavery on the frontline, Local Authority commissioning and assurance processes, including service-level agreements and contracts, must ensure that organisations and individuals who are delivering services for them know how to spot signs of modern slavery and where to report them to. Only then will we begin to turn the tide on awareness on the frontline.



Responding to the crime:

5 **The Government must enshrine survivor rights in law to guarantee and protect their access to support.** This should be done by finally passing the Modern Slavery (Victim Support) Bill 2019-2021, which would give victims in England and Wales a guaranteed right to support during the initial period when the NRM decision is being made, and for a further minimum of 12 months afterwards. **We also call on the Government to consider further support at that point, akin to the US-style 'Trafficking in Persons Visas' (T-Visa) that offers temporary leave to remain where a victim is assisting as a witness in a criminal investigation.** This could be issued as applicable at the end of the minimum 12 month entitlement within the Victim Support Bill if an individual is continuing to cooperate with the police. Along with other measures in our report, such a step is vital for supporting the exploited and for our prospects of bringing traffickers to justice. Putting victims first and guaranteeing their access to support is critical to gaining trust and unlocking crucial evidence against their traffickers. The Modern Slavery Act does not place a duty on the State to provide support to victims of modern slavery nor does it set out the specific support measures that victims are entitled to, such as access to safe and appropriate accommodation. Currently, victims are forced to rely on specific support provisions found in international legislation. Victim support measures must be placed on a statutory footing in the UK to provide victims with legal rights to claim the support they need and are entitled to, especially in view of the UK leaving the EU.

6 **The Government needs to invest in localising the decision-making process within the National Referral Mechanism (NRM)** to ensure more tailored support, local ownership and greater specialism in response to the crime. Currently NRM decisions on the status of potential victims are made centrally by the Single Competent Authority at the Home Office. Despite the reforms, the delays in processing the cases that have been building up for years are causing a significant strain on the system, but most importantly are negatively affecting victims' recovery. Earlier this year Dame Sara Thornton, the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, called for the "decision making on child trafficking cases to be taken out of the Home Office and devolved to local authorities", which would be better placed to provide subsequent support for the child, but they must be adequately funded to take on such a responsibility.⁶⁵ We agree and believe that a similar approach should be applied when making decisions on adult modern slavery cases too. With the right expertise around the table and appropriate resources and training in place, a devolved decision-making process should enable faster and better-informed decisions resulting in a more tailored approach to supporting victims.



⁶⁵ "Children coerced into drug trafficking face cycle of exploitation due to failings in system, warns slavery tsar", The Independent, March 2020 <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/county-lines-slavery-child-trafficking-drugs-protection-sara-thornton-a9365906.html>

7

The potential of new voluntary sector and police partnerships should be unleashed when it comes to survivor engagement. Police have neither the time nor expertise to manage victims as effectively as required in the early stages of investigations. Charities are much better placed to assist as people begin their recovery and to act as a trusted bridge between victims and law enforcement. We lose vast amounts of intelligence and evidence when victims disengage. The Home Office should therefore commission a consortium of specialist NGOs to undertake formal pilots of promising interventions like the Victim Navigator programme, and the MARAC model that is widely used for domestic abuse. This would compliment the Government-funded Victim Care contract. Engaging victims effectively is the right thing to do for their recovery and could transform our prospects of bringing offenders to justice.

8

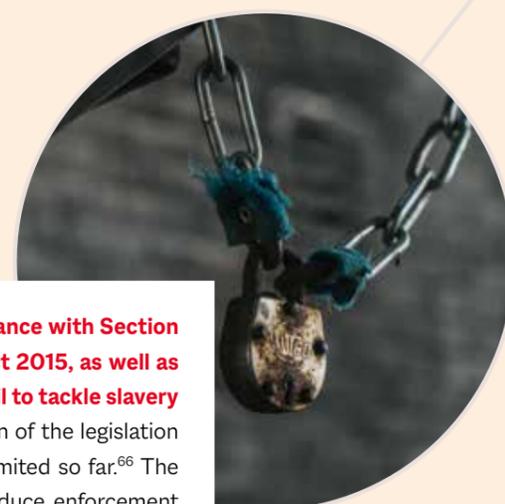
Specialist investigation and victim engagement training for police officers should be increased. As described in the report, the Modern Slavery Police Transformation Programme has produced a number of outstanding resources and guidance, as well as specialised training on how to conduct modern slavery investigations. Recently the College for Policing introduced a four-day specialist investigator training course to help police officers bring perpetrators to justice. Yet it is clear that gaps in knowledge and skills amongst police officers, prosecutors and the judiciary remain a hindrance to achieving successful prosecutions. We also see criminal methods evolving constantly. Specialist training for investigating officers, prosecutors and judges must therefore be increased to ensure it reaches a wider cohort of professionals. It is important to ensure that a particular emphasis is put on understanding the complexities of modern slavery crime, in particular victims' underlying vulnerabilities and the challenges of establishing and maintaining victim engagement during the course of a prosecution.

9

It is time for the Government and authorities to consider whether additional safeguarding options should be made available to frontline workers such as police officers, social services and UK Border Force personnel who currently face the prospect of leaving victims in situations of suspected exploitation because they lack the rights or powers to bring them to safety, even temporarily. This is an issue raised regularly on the frontline and it has been flagged repeatedly by other reviews, including the 2016 Modern Slavery Act Review by Caroline Haughey OBE QC. Upon hearing so many accounts of police and Border teams facing no other option than to leave victims in situations of modern slavery, exposed to significant harm, or having to arrest them as the only way to remove them from danger, we urge the Government to convene the expertise required to consider options for victims being brought to places of safety. Any review of this kind should investigate whether new powers and protocols are required, how the right safeguards could be established, and what support NGOs and local agencies can offer to keep people safe. We acknowledge the fact that serious consideration and extensive consultation must take place to ascertain when such powers should be applied. Too many victims are knowingly being left in extremely high-risk situations without the capacity or capability to exit, and we owe it to them to explore all possible safeguarding options.

10

Fast track Government-to-Government Safe Return and Reintegration schemes should be developed for survivors who are willing to return home at any stage of their recovery process, partnering with key source countries and NGOs. Currently the Government-funded Voluntary Return Scheme allows non-British victims to return only after they are referred to the NRM. Non-EEA nationals can apply for return at any time of their NRM journey, whereas EEA nationals can only benefit from it after they receive a positive 'conclusive grounds decision', which may take months. However, it is important to support people to return home safely if they wish to do so before the NRM decision is made, whilst maintaining contact with UK authorities. Too many survivors currently languish in the UK, go missing or make it home informally only to be re-trafficked or lose touch with UK police investigators. The introduction of formal safe return and reintegration schemes would enable better coordination with key countries, utilise networks of NGOs at both destination and source, enable victims to remain engaged in UK criminal investigations and focus political attention on the efforts of source countries to prevent human trafficking. In particular this presents a positive opportunity to engage with European Union member states and our continental neighbours. The Home Office's Assisted Voluntary Return scheme needs strengthening for victims of modern slavery, particularly in moving from cash payments (up to £2,000), which increase vulnerability or go to waste, to targeted spending which aids recovery and avoids re-trafficking.



11 **The Government must launch an urgent inquiry into the growing exploitation of British adults and children**, both seen and unseen, to gain a better understanding about their complex needs, how they fall victim to traffickers and how they can access the support they are entitled to, given that many agencies do not consider an NRM referral possible or appropriate. Special emphasis and investment should be given to early intervention to break the cycle of abuse many British children and adults are experiencing. Protection measures must also be put in place to stop them from being re-exploited. As a first and urgent step, we are calling the Government to remove the 'local connection' rules for victims of modern slavery who need to be moved across local authority boundaries to escape their situation of abuse and exploitation and be housed safely. This policy already applies for victims of domestic abuse, under statutory guidance on improving access to social housing, and should be extended to victims of modern slavery who need access to safe accommodation.

12 **A far more robust early assessment tool and guidance for investigating officers, prosecutors and judiciary must be developed to prevent the abuse of the Statutory Defence in the Modern Slavery Act**, and ensure that slavery victims are protected and criminals are put behind bars. The non-prosecution of victims is an important principle in law, but one which currently undermines confidence in the legislation.

13 **The Department for Work and Pensions must develop more robust measures to identify cases of modern slavery and work in partnership with other law enforcement agencies to disrupt criminal activity.** These should include, but not be limited to, mandatory training for Jobcentre work coaches, who are often the first to encounter a potential victim, as well as the development of a flag system for modern slavery indicators on the DWP database. Too many traffickers are defrauding the benefit system at the same time as they are exploiting their victims. The Government must get to grips with the issue of benefit fraud and its links to modern slavery and develop robust intervention measures to fight modern slavery from this angle. Under Universal Credit, measures that require each claimant to be individually assessed provide a unique opportunity to spot the signs of modern slavery, flag them accordingly and report them to the right agency for intervention. So much of this intelligence is currently being missed as a result of the chronic lack of awareness in this key sector.

14 **The Government must introduce measures to increase compliance with Section 54 (Transparency in Supply Chains) of the Modern Slavery Act 2015, as well as the ability to scrutinise and hold to account companies that fail to tackle slavery in their supply chains.** The time has come to tighten this section of the legislation further, as the impact on supply chain transparency has been limited so far.⁶⁶ The Government must track compliance with Section 54 and introduce enforcement measures and penalties for those companies who fail to address slavery in their supply chains. This is important in order to prevent an increase in labour exploitation in the aftermath of COVID-19, as companies rush to recoup their losses. This issue is particularly pressing given reports of the links between labour exploitation in garment factories and an outbreak of COVID-19 in Leicester. Furthermore, the Home Office must now publish its report following the Transparency in Supply Chains consultation held in July-September 2019.⁶⁷ It is long overdue.

International action:

15 **The Government must prioritise international law enforcement cooperation and coordination to pursue traffickers through effective partnerships with the source and transit countries.** Given the transnational nature of this crime, international cooperation and coordination in fighting it are crucial. Organised Criminal Groups operate with flexibility across international borders and therefore so must Governments as they work to dismantle these criminal networks. Post-Brexit in particular, innovative European partnerships that would aid information sharing and cross-border cooperation for the purposes of pursuing traffickers and bringing them to justice are essential. We cannot allow political tensions to prevent action against organised crime, and we must challenge the European Union to fight this crime with even greater vigour and focus.

16 **Tackling modern slavery at source and in transit countries must remain a priority for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, as the overseas aid budget transitions across from the Department for International Development.** The UK's anti-human trafficking and slavery investment overseas must be reviewed to determine whether it is sufficiently targeted at key source countries and global hotspots. In particular, programmes addressing underlying vulnerabilities to modern slavery exacerbated by COVID-19 must be prioritised when allocating funding to the countries most affected by the pandemic. The soft power of overseas aid should be exerted, particularly in post-Brexit trade talks, to move key countries forward, as happens with the US Government's annual Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report.

⁶⁶ Independent Review of the Modern Slavery Act 2019

⁶⁷ Transparency in Supply Chains consultation, Home Office, July-September 2019 <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/transparency-in-supply-chains>

Appendix

The National Data Analytics Solution (NDAS) is a partnership of nine law enforcement agencies with the scope to develop a new, transformative and advanced data analytics capability for law enforcement. Funded by the Home Office, the project aims to develop the capability to support police and other law enforcement agencies to meet the policing challenges of the 21st Century by deriving greater value from the wealth of data that already exists within police forces.

The NDAS model uses machine learning to identify networks of people and events linked to modern slavery, and applies Natural Language Processing (NLP) - a form of artificial intelligence that recognises key words from lengthy police documents - to identify additional, previously unrecognised modern slavery events, and the people linked to those events. What would traditionally take an analyst thousands of hours to do, the system produces in seconds. It is hoped that police forces across the country will be able to use this model to understand the full nature of modern slavery and its links to other, more traditional and well-understood organised crime types involving firearms and drug trafficking. This tool will also help inform a detailed understanding of how to dismantle these networks and safeguard vulnerable people.

The system presents a unique opportunity to provide a more accurate estimate of the number of victims of modern slavery in the UK, because it is able to apply NLP to identify untagged as well as already tagged modern slavery events within police data.

NDAS analysed data from West Midlands Police Force in 2017 (the most recent full year for which data is available). The data included:

1. Modern slavery events already tagged as such by the police, with victims, suspects and offenders associated with these events already identified;
2. Crime reports not tagged as modern slavery but where the NLP system identified modern slavery elements from within the case records. The system is able to identify the number of individual victims, suspects and offenders associated with these crime reports;
3. Intelligence logs not tagged as modern slavery but where the NLP system identified modern slavery elements from within the intelligence log. The system is able to identify the number of individuals associated with these logs but cannot distinguish between victims, suspects and offenders.

The system has a strong accuracy rate of 90 per cent, such that nine in every ten cases the system identified as modern slavery would also be judged to be so by a human police analyst. The system is more likely to fail to identify a modern slavery case (false negative) than to erroneously identify a case as modern slavery (false positive) - in particular it can fail to identify cases of the fast-growing county lines crime type which frequently involves young people trapped in modern slavery.

As such, the system is liable to produce a significant underestimate rather than an overestimate. Other limitations include that the system only links events to identifiable people. Any event that does not contain the details of an identifiable person will not count towards the figures. For

example, an intelligence log that says "10 victims of slavery are being housed at address X" might indicate that there are 10 victims, but they would not be included in the count, again leading to an underestimate. A further limitation is the fact that the system cannot distinguish between strong and weak intelligence logs, so there is no way of fully understanding the impact of flawed or unverified intelligence on the estimate. Overall NDAS' analysts suggest that the system has a high degree of accuracy and would be more likely to produce an underestimated rather than overestimated figure.

For West Midlands Police, the numbers of modern slavery victims identified are as follows:

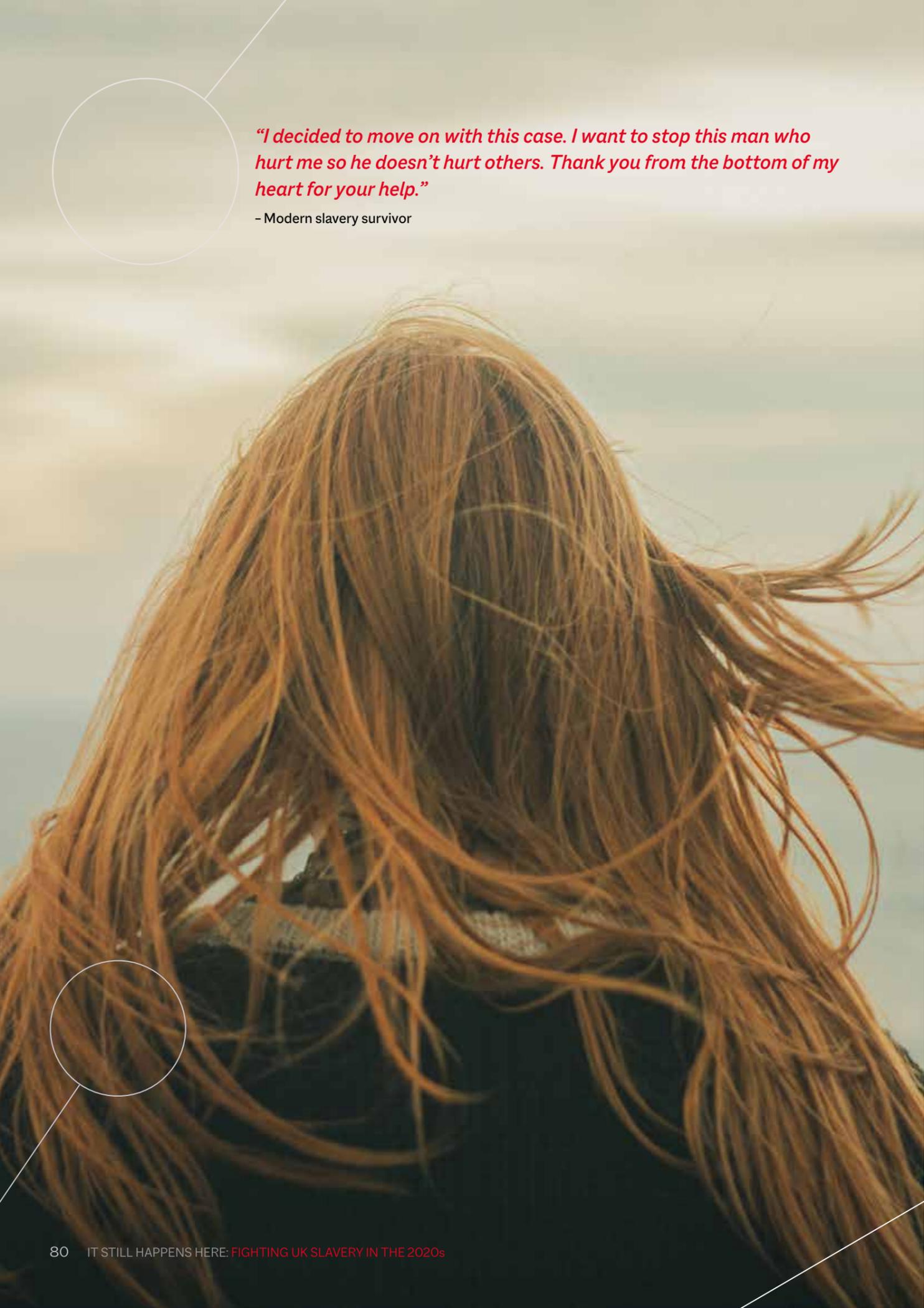
1. Modern slavery events already tagged as such by the police: **312 victims**, 78 suspects and offenders;
2. Crime reports not tagged as modern slavery but where the NLP system identified modern slavery elements from within the case records - 436 crime reports with modern slavery identified, with **374 victims**, 188 suspects and offenders and three witnesses associated with these crime reports;
3. Intelligence logs not tagged as modern slavery but where the NLP system identified modern slavery elements from within the intelligence log - 1,722 logs with 4,810 individuals associated with these logs. The system cannot distinguish between victims, suspects and offenders within these intelligence logs - however, given that 80 per cent of individuals in the already-tagged modern slavery crime reports were victims, and 66 per cent of individuals from the newly-identified modern slavery crime reports were victims, we can take an averaged estimate that approximately 73 per cent of individuals associated with the intelligence logs were victims. This yields an estimated **3,511 victims** of modern slavery associated with the analysed intelligence logs.

Combined, this gives a **total number of 4,197 modern slavery victims from within the police data for West Midlands Police** in 2017.

We took this estimate of 4,197 victims in the population of this police area and applied the same proportion to the UK population, which is 23.7 times larger. This extrapolation is justifiable given that the areas served by West Midlands Police are not atypical from the rest of the UK (unlike the Metropolitan Police) - in fact its overall crime rate per 1,000 population is below the national average. We therefore estimate that there could have been around **99,469 victims of modern slavery in the UK identifiable from police data in 2017**. It should be noted that this is likely to be a very conservative estimate as these are identified individuals in police intelligence. It would be expected that there are many other victims looked after by charities or local authorities, or those who remain enslaved, who do not appear in police data. Furthermore, since both NRM referrals and police crime reports have increased by more than 100 per cent since 2017, this estimate is again likely to be vastly conservative given that it does not account for the growth in this crime type in the last two years.

“I decided to move on with this case. I want to stop this man who hurt me so he doesn’t hurt others. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for your help.”

- Modern slavery survivor



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